Incorporating Worlds of IF

FEBRUARY 1975 75¢ 14155 S•M

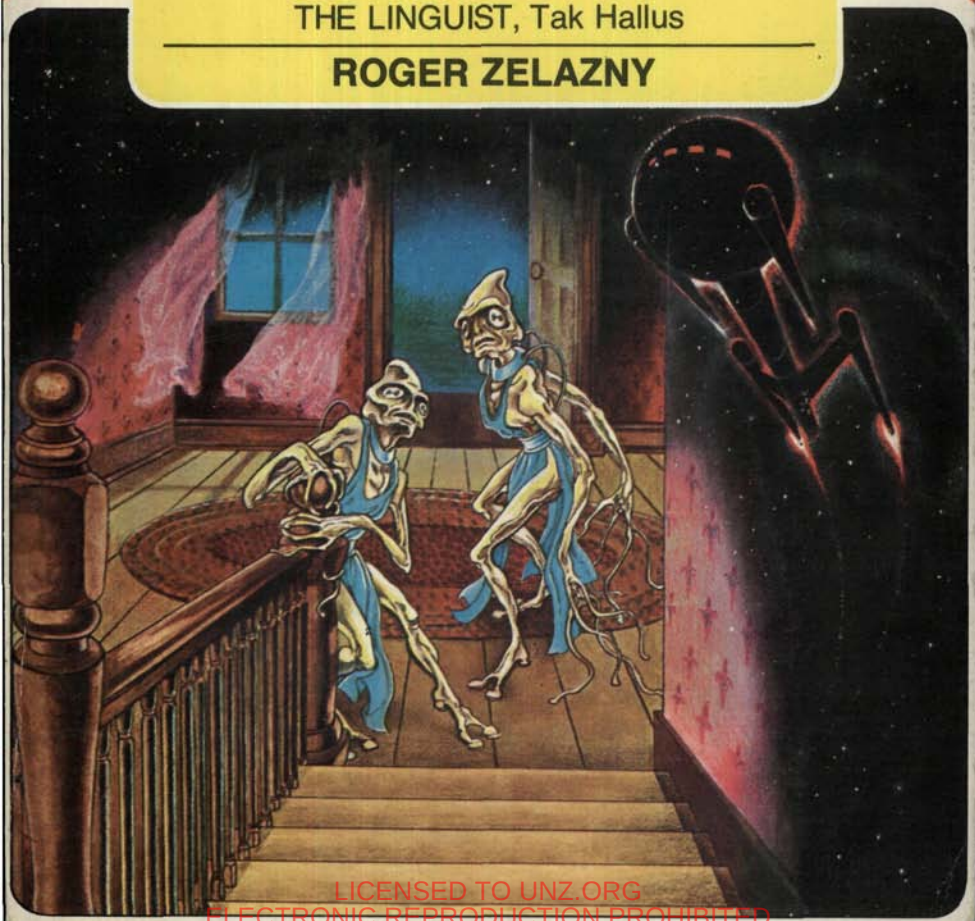
Galaxy

MICHAEL BISHOP
ALLEGIANCES

THE ANNIHILATION OF ANGKOR APEIRON, Fred Saberhagen

THE LINGUIST, Tak Hallus

ROGER ZELAZNY



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FEBRUARY 1975
Vol. 36, No. 2

Galaxy
SCIENCE FICTION
MAGAZINE

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the

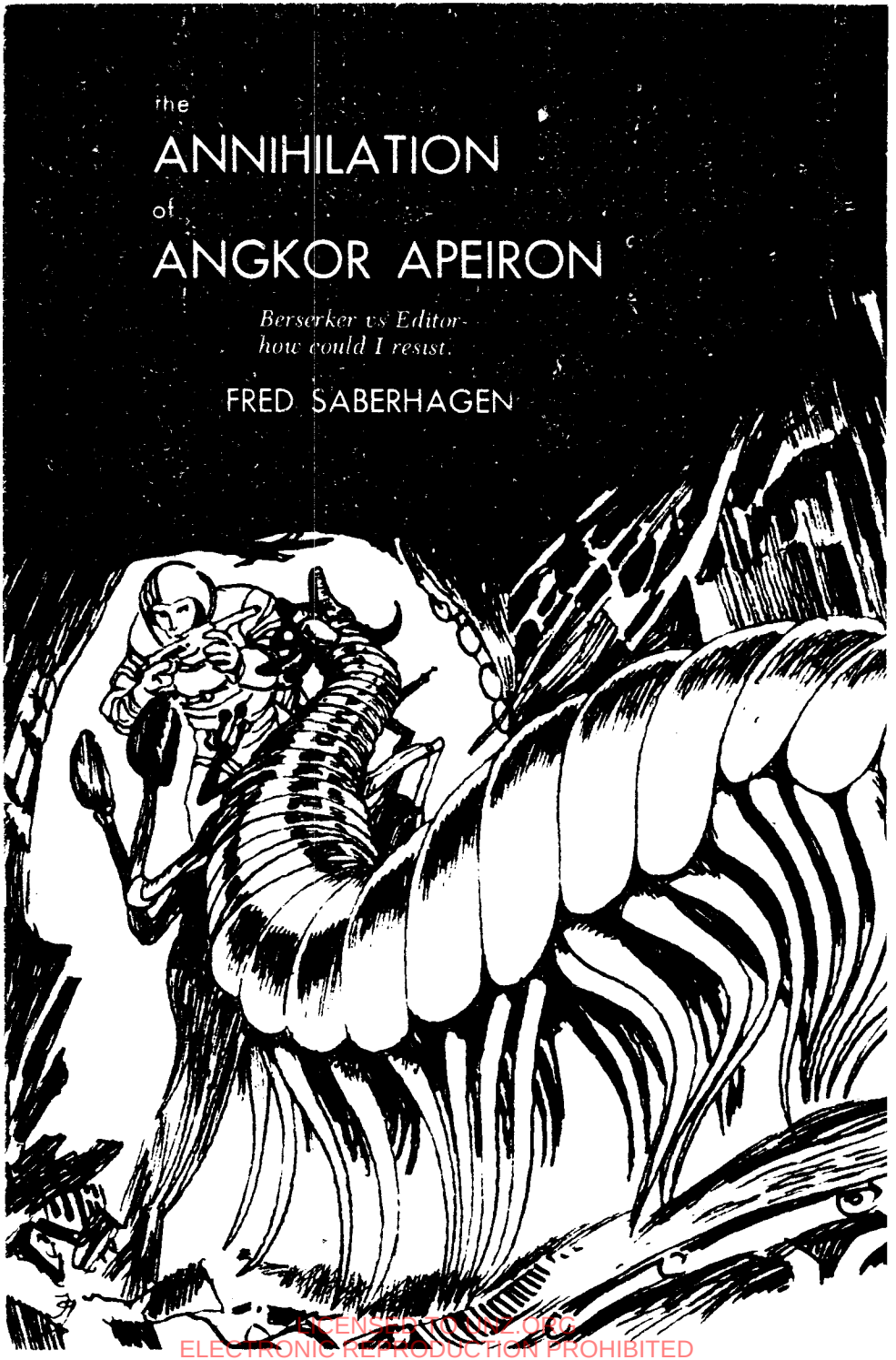
ANNIHILATION

of

ANGKOR APEIRON

Berserker vs Editor—
how could I resist.

FRED SABERHAGEN



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THE BATTLE was a long one for deep space, lasting well over a standard hour, and as fierce as any fight in which the losing side can have no expectation of survival. Commander Ridolfi had fought his heavy cruiser, the *Dipavamsa*, with a desperate skill that twice in a matter of minutes forestalled instant destruction by the berserker's missiles, and each member of his crew performed superbly well in making such combat decisions as could be handled slowly enough to let human brains co-operate with their slave computers.

The human crew of course faced death or worse if they should lose. And the berserker, their unliving foe, faced its own analogue of death and worse-than-death. To lose would mean destruction—which was nothing to a berserker if destruction could bring victory. But destruction in defeat meant certain failure to achieve any further progress toward its programmed goal, the annihilation of all life, whenever and wherever it could be attacked.

Aboard the *Dipavamsa* there were only four civilian passengers, including Otto Novotny, who in his long life had never come close to taking part in a battle before and who felt a great deal too old and paunchy for such endeavors now. Nevertheless he was more alert than any of the other civilians, and had begun to don his requisite suit of space armor as soon as the Battle Stations klaxon sounded, while the other three were still wondering aloud if it was only practice.

Ten seconds later the first berserker missile blew against the cruiser's defensive screens, a mere kilometer from her hull, and they all knew better.

DIPAVAMSA WAS FIGHTING for her life several light years from any star, along a trade route where in these last few standard months no unarmed vessels had dared to try to pass. The berserker machine, a sphere some forty or fifty kilometers in diameter, all armor and combat computers and heavy weapons and drive, had waited like a spider in the midst of the net of detectors it had planted in subspace. The region where its detectors existed was conterminous to one in normal space where a strait of hard vacuum bent between two nebulae, forming a bottleneck only a few billion kilometers wide in which a reasonably fast passage could be achieved. When a manned ship dared to try the strait—heavy cruiser or not—the berserker jumped to the attack.

Locked together with their armaments of fields and counterfields like grappling ocean ships of old, the contending metallic giants rolled into normal space,

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there to remain until the issue was decided. After the first enemy missile-blast reverberated through the cruiser's hull, Novotny thought that the battle would probably be over one way or the other before he could get himself completely into the unfamiliar armor. His efforts were complicated by a sudden lack of artificial gravity; every erg of the cruiser's energies was suddenly needed for more important things than maintaining a rightsideup.

But he persevered, working with the same methodical speed with which he usually solved problems of quite a different kind and finally got the armor on. No sooner had he sealed its last seam and begun to wonder what to do next, when *Dipavamsa's* hull was breached by blast and beam. Hatches slammed to seal compartments, but the air in their compartment could not be held and Novotny saw the lives of his companions who had been too slow snuffed out like candle flames.

After that the battle became a scrambling confusion of largely physical effort for the humans who took part in it. For Novotny especially, who had less idea of what to expect than did any of the cruiser's crew and who was not in as good shape as they were either. Now the berserker chose to hurl some of its auxiliary machines across the narrow no-man's-land of space to try to board the cruiser. It could use the ship if it could capture it still reasonably intact, and probably it wanted living prisoners.

PRISONERS of course were useful for interrogation, after which a berserker generally killed them quickly; it was programmed only to pursue death, not suffering, though of course it was quite willing to apply judicious torture to extract information of value in advancing the cause of death. And prisoners were needed for experiments that the berserkers carried on extensively, in an effort to learn what made Homo Sapiens, a species now spread across this part of the Galaxy, such a resistant life-form to their relentless program of sterilization.

The berserkers were automated warships, made by an unknown race to fight in an interstellar war that had been over ages since; they had outlasted their original enemies and their makers as well, having been programmed and equipped to rebuild and reproduce themselves. Still trying to carry out their originally programmed task, they had made an age-long progress across the spiral arms, leaving nothing living in their wake.

While following the motions of the Commander's arms, which were gesturing to shovel suited people from one wrecked-looking

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compartment to another, Novotny had a chance to look out through the holed hull to catch his first glimpse of the enemy. The monstrous spherical hull of the berserker was visible by the cherry-glow of craters that the cruiser's weapons had pocked across its armor hide. One crater flared anew while Novotny watched, flamed with some power that seemed to be eating like a cancer into the enemy's metal bowels. But again the cruiser was rocked and shaken in its turn, Novotny and Commander Ridolfi were picked up by the same invisible hand and slammed together into a bulkhead, saved only by their suits from broken bones.

Now some of the berserker's boarding machines, which were a little bigger than men and of divers shapes, managed to get aboard *Dipavamsa*, and Novotny had a chance to see the enemy at close range. Men, some of whom were hardened veterans, were screaming around him in terror, but his own unconsciously-maintained attitude was that under conditions like these one could hardly spare the time to be frightened. Vaguely he thought of this situation as resembling an impossible editorial deadline—one thing that could never help was panic. He followed as best he could the Commander's waved and shouted orders, and kept alert. At last he got his own chance to blaze away at the foe, with a small recoilless rifle he had snatched up from a fallen crewman's hands.

By that time—as Novotny confusedly understood, from scraps of combat jargon that came into his helmet—Commander Ridolfi had ordered his Second Officer and a picked crew to leave the cruiser in an armed launch that could take shelter among the drifts and waves of nebular material in space nearby, darting through where the bulky berserker could not pass at speed. It was a feigned acknowledgement of defeat, intended to make the enemy think they were abandoning ship, a battle tactic to lure the damaged enemy in where a sharp counterattack might still destroy it.

Ridolfi himself, as the cruiser's commanding officer, and Novotny, as more or less useless baggage, were among those who stayed aboard her and tried to fight a delaying action through her corridors. The vacuum around Novotny's helmet continued to buzz and sing with the strange energies of this battle; he clutched his recoilless rifle and continued to fire it toward the enemy's boarding machines whenever he caught a glimpse of one of them. He could not have said whether or not his shots were doing any good. He also tried to stay close to Ridolfi's side; whether he felt in slightly less

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hopeless danger there, or was hoping thus to improve his chances of being useful, he did not pause to consider. Ridolfi indeed kept snapping orders, but they were meant for members of his crew.

The two of them were still together, trying to defend the central control room of the ship, when Death struck closer to them than an any moment yet.

It came very suddenly. One moment Novotny was still looking toward Ridolfi for a hint of what they might try to do next—and the next moment a berserker machine that looked like a cross between a centipede and a crab had thrown itself upon them and they were prisoners. Steel claws that moved with the force of atomic power effortlessly tore Novotny's rocket launcher away and wrenched the Commander's sidearm from his hand. The berserker shifted its grip then, holding each pair of human arms helpless with a single claw—and then machine and men went down together in a tangle as a new force slammed at the cruiser from outside. The Second Officer and his picked crew, in their fresh and undamaged launch, had begun their counterattack.

The crab-centipede was wrecked, sheared almost in two, as the launch sent something like the Angel of the Lord passing almost invisibly through the embattled ship, cutting selectively, passing over fragile human bodies and machinery that it could somehow identify as human property.

The mass of his late captor, and its tenacious grip which had not relaxed with the destruction of its computer-brain, pinned Novotny in an angle between deck and bulkhead, surrounded by wreckage. Beside him Ridolfi grunted and struggled in similar difficulties. Then they abruptly ceased their efforts to get free, simultaneously ceased even to breathe—another berserker machine was entering the damaged control room.

If it was aware of them, it did not turn. It moved straight to one of the panels before which a human astrogator normally sat, and with a startling delicacy began to remove the panel from its mounting. Neatly—almost timidly, it seemed—it probed for the panel fasteners, teasing and tickling at them with grasping devices that could have ripped the panel free like so much tissue paper.

. . . it was working so carefully, and now it almost had what it was after. It reached inside and pulled out . . . very slowly . . .

. . . a small metal case . . .

That burst into a flaming snowball even as the berserker oh so gently tugged it free of its connections, a blaze that here in free fall

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sent out its flames in a sunburst of straight radii, a wad of radiant glory that the enemy instantly hurled away. Without pause the enemy turned to snatch up a small bundle of paper printout that writhed weightlessly across the deck. It shoved this inside itself, door slamming shut protectively across the orifice—and the machine was gone, lunging with inhuman speed out of the room again.

"Novotny." The two of them gasped for breath again and once more struggled against the dead claws that held them prisoner. "Look—can you shift your weight this way? Lean on it here, maybe I can get a hand out of this claw. . ."

After a minute or two of cooperative effort both of them were free. From some comparatively great distance the shocks and slams of battle were still coming to them through the hull. "Novotny, listen to me." The Commander talked while looking for his pistol, which he at last grabbed from a turning swirl of other weightless debris that drifted in the middle of the room. "It was going after our astrogational databank just then. After that thing that burst into flame?"

"I saw."

"It didn't get what it wanted, because the bank's destructor charge worked when it was pulled out. But it must need astrogational information badly, or it wouldn't have sent a machine after it, before the battle's even over. Maybe its own banks have been shot up."

Novotny moved his head inside his helmet, showing that he understood so far.

The Commander had his pistol back, held absently in his right hand, and his left hand clamped briefly on Novotny's suited arm. "I believe you have in your quarters something it could use as a substitute. I understand you're traveling with the whole new edition of Encyclopedia Galactica in microstorage—and the EG gives galactic coordinates for all inhabited systems, right?"

Novotny agreed again. Now that he had been almost immobile for a little while, his muscles were starting to stiffen from the unaccustomed workout. He could hear the wheezings from inside his own chest, and his body was beginning to feel like so much fluid lead. If they weren't in free fall he would certainly be dizzy and have to sit down. Decades at a senior executive's desk had left him too fat and old for this kind of nonsense.

But he was moving again now, keeping up with the agile Commander as they picked their way out of the ruined control room, which now looked not in fit shape for controlling anything.

"Then we've got to get to your

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quarters," the Commander was saying, "while there's still a chance. You've got just the one copy of the encyclopedia there?"

"Yes."

"We must see that it's destroyed."

They had started down a corridor, and there came a glimpse of a machine moving ahead of them, and the vibrations of its massy passage came through the bulkheads to their gripping hands. Taking shelter together in a doorway, they waited for it to get out of their way.

The Commander kept trying to make contact with his Second Officer by suit radio, but seemed unable to get any reply. Maybe, thought Novotny, it's only that the space between is far too noisy. . .

"Commander," he asked, when there was a momentary opportunity, "What sector are we in now? Of the Galaxy, I mean, in Revised Galactic Coordinates?"

Ridolfi's eyes came to full focus on him for what might have been the first time. "Omicron Sector, Ring Eleven—what does it matter? Oh, you mean you want to know which volumes of your set it will be most important to destroy. Good thinking. That damned machine will be too shot up itself to get out of Omicron without help. I don't think it'll be able to catch another ship, even if one should come along. It'll be trying to find an undefended planet nearby, within a light year or two if possible, preferably an inhabited one where there'll be machines it can take over and some readymade materials that it can use to repair itself."

"And my encyclopedia is now the only means by which it can locate such a planet?"

"That's the way I read the situation. It can't just go visiting stars at random, the chance of success is far too small . . . remember that printout it picked up from the control room floor? That was a copy of what we call the Military Information Sheet, which we got when we filed our flight plan. Among other things it contains a list of all the *defended* planets along our projected course—all the places where we might be able to look for help in case of an emergency. I suppose it'll go for one of them if it can't find anything better. But in your reference book it's likely to get the address of some undefended one . . . the war's a recent thing in this neck of the galactic woods, remember?"

Novotny's face bore a doubtful look, but the Commander was no longer watching him.

"Coast's clear, Novotny. Let's move." Then the two of them were in motion again, diving and scrambling in free fall. For the moment their luck held; no more berserkers came in sight as they

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reached the stateroom corridor and swam along it to the door of Novotny's cabin. The door had been jammed shut by some warping of the battered ship around it, and it took the men an agonizing moment or two to force it free.

Then they were inside. "Where is it?"

"There on the table, Commander. Already plugged into the reading machine. But wait." A new anxiety had come into Novotny's voice. "I'm not sure that destruction is our wisest move."

Commander Ridolfi only looked at him. "Get back."

But Novotny had not moved when a third figure suddenly joined them in the little cabin; the crab-centipede's cousin, which raised a multitude of claws.

The Commander aimed his gun again, but not at the berserker. He thought his own life and battle now lost anyway, and more important than perhaps damaging one more of the berserker's machines would be denying it this information on new targets. He aimed at the reading machine that sat like some dull sculpture on the table.

Novotny reached out deliberately and knocked Ridolfi's arm aside.

The berserker, on the verge of killing both of them, hesitated fractionally as it observed their struggle. Did one of these life-units wish to become goodlife, a willing ally of the cause of Death? Such conversions had happened before, more than a few times, and a goodlife could be very useful. And what on the table was so important that a life-unit struggled to destroy it—?

From the armed launch came the next phase of counterattack. The cabin was nearly ripped apart. The berserker lashed out at Ridolfi, and the Commander saw that his pistol was gone again, before it could be fired, and his arm gone with it almost to the shoulder. The suit will seal itself around the wound, he thought, in sudden massive shock that made all things seem trivial. He saw the reading machine snatched up from the table in the claws of the berserker, and the launch's weapons struck again. A fresh gust of escaping atmosphere whirled through the cruiser from a newly-ruptured compartment, and with the last glow of his consciousness the Commander could see stars.

HIS FIRST FEELING when his wits came back was sheer astonishment at being still alive. Astonishment deepened when he realized that he had somehow been brought on board the armored launch. All four bunks in its tiny sickbay were full of wounded, and men and women and machines were steadily at

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work, passing back and forth continually in the small space between the bunks.

The Second Officer came in to report, relief dawning on his face when he saw that Ridolfi was getting up and evidently in shape to resume his command. Shock and loss of blood had been treated, pain blocked, and bandages sealed the wound from which a new arm could one day be made to grow.

The Second made his report concisely. The launch was now some half a million kilometers within the nebula, its defenses alertly repelling or safely detonating—so far—all the torpedoes that the berserker had sent after it. The battle had ground to a halt, otherwise, in mutual though incomplete destruction. What was left of the cruiser had now been abandoned by both contending forces. Before pulling back deep within the nebula, the launch had dared to delay long enough to follow distress signals and pick up two suited survivors who had, it seemed, somehow been blown clean away from the embattled cruiser in the last stages of the fighting. One of the survivors was Commander Ridolfi himself. The other. . .

"That makes nineteen people on the air and food," the Second Officer mused, as they stood looking down at the collapsed shape of Otto Novotny, slumped in total exhaustion in a corner of the small dayroom where there hardly seemed room for his gross form. "Still, we should be able to recycle, and make supplies last until we're eventually picked up. . ."

"I don't know if there'll be nineteen or not, for very long." Ridolfi's voice was hard as that of one just going into battle, not coming out of it, and his eyes were welded on the fat civilian.

"Sir?" The Second didn't get it at all, not yet.

"I mean, Mister, that unless I get some questions answered by this man here, and answered damn fast, I'm going to convene a formal court and press charges against him of voluntarily aiding a berserker."

THERE WERE ONLY six people in the dayroom when the first informal inquiry began; the Commander didn't want to prejudice possible jurors if the thing came to a formal trial, which he was empowered to give even civilians when in space and in the face of the enemy.

As Novotny, by now somewhat recovered though still slow of movement and blinking a bit bewilderedly, was ushered in and shown to the seat across the table from him, the Commander was simultaneously handed a note from the other side. It informed him that the berserker had just been observed dropping out of

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normal space in the area of the battle. Instruments showed it departing the local area, having evidently completed such emergency repairs as it could manage on the spot. A reading on the subspace signals of its departure gave a vector for its probable destination that deepened the lines carved down through Ridolfi's cheeks.

A silence grew in the room, until Ridolfi spoke. "This is not yet a trial, Mr. Novotny. But I warn you that there may be one before we get back to a planet, if we ever do; or are picked up by another human ship, if we ever are. If there is a trial, you will be charged with voluntarily aiding a berserker, and conviction will carry an almost certain penalty of death."

Exhaustion and puzzlement seemed to be absorbed almost at once within the layers of fat as Novotny pulled himself together. "Ah. I stand ready, of course, Commander, to answer any questions on my behavior that you may have."

"That's good. Frank answers will be required." Ridolfi tried to keep his one hand from fidgetting before him on the table. "On board the cruiser, in a combat situation, you deliberately interfered with my attempt to destroy the databank containing your encyclopedia. Do you deny it?"

Novotny was sitting very still, as if he feared that movement

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might land him in further trouble of some kind. He thought before answering, and his face maintained a frown. 'No, I do not deny that, Commander."

The Commander paused, then put his arm out on the table, fingers opened, elbow straight, a dominating gesture. "You do not. Very well. My intention in destroying that data, sir, was to prevent its use as an astrogational aid by the berserker. If you wanted to save it, it was surely not for yourself. Did you expect that the berserker might accord you some favorable treatment if you. . ."

Novotny was shaking his head. "I very seriously doubt that the data in the encyclopedia will do the enemy the least bit of good, in this case. Nor did I wish to help the enemy."

The Commander's voice was relentlessly unchanged. "On the cruiser, you and I both saw the berserker going after the astrogational databank, which it evidently needed but didn't get.

"We also know the enemy is severely damaged, which means it will be looking for some comparatively near planet where it can commandeer machinery and materials to repair itself; in addition, of course, to wiping out as many unprotected human lives there as it can reach. Because we fought it to a standstill here in space doesn't mean it won't be able to poison an atmosphere and depopulate a planet, if it comes on one only lightly defended or takes one unaware. Is all this news to you?"

"I think I understand all this, Commander."

"Let those who are here with us be witness that you do." Ridolfi glanced briefly round at the faces of the others, all of them staring now at the accused. "Because so far you are answering yourself right into a trial, Mister Novotny. There are only two things, basically, that a berserker ever wants or needs: victims, and facilities for repair and refitting. And you've shown this one where to go for both of them."

Novotny slumped a little in his chair and closed his eyes. But when he opened them his voice was as steady as before. "Commander, if I am indeed on trial for my life, or likely to be, then I would like to hear the charges and the evidence as fully as possible before I try to answer them. Go on."

"Very well." Ridolfi nodded grimly. "You came on board the *Dipavamsa* with two copies of your new edition, one of which was subsequently and routinely stowed aboard this launch, along with some other baggage not immediately in use. That copy is still here and available, and since going off combat alert I've fed it into our computer and asked for a readout—as the berserker can

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readily do with the copy you gave it—of all inhabited planets within seven light-years of where our battle was fought. That's about as far as that berserker is going to get without repairs; and extending the radius another light year or so brings no new planets in."

The Commander had a paper which he now consulted. "There are seven inhabited planets to be found, according to the Encyclopedia Galactica, within that radius. They are Angkor Apeiron, Comparettia, Epirus, Francavilla, Han Kao, Reissner, and Yang Ch'i. Exact coordinates, RGC, are given for each." He put one piece of paper on the table and took another from a pocket of his shirt. "I have here part of a spare copy of the Military Information Sheet given us when we filed our flight plan before departing on this trip. Among other things, it lists the six inhabited planets in this same region that have notable ground defenses, or fleet units standing by, or both. As one more bit of evidence, Mr. Novotny, let me state now that you were also a witness with me that a copy of this list of the six defended planets was also seized by the berserker. Any denials yet?" Ridolfi's fingers were shaking and he put the second paper down.

"Not yet, Commander."

"Though whether you understood the full implications of that seizure at the time. . ."

"I had . . . some idea, I suppose, of what the implications were. Proceed."

Ridolfi read: "The six defended planets on the military list for this region are: Comparettia, Epirus, Francavilla, Han Kao, Reissner, and Yang Ch'i. Notably missing from this military list is Angkor Apeiron." The Commander pushed his second paper out on the table beside the first, where anyone who wished might look them over, and then produced a third.

He went on: "According to the latest census figures, as given in this EG article, this world has about eleven million, six hundred thousand inhabitants. Its chief export industries are crystal growing and natural honey. The spaceport is small, but probably the berserker could plunder it for useful machines and materials after it has wiped out what appears to be an undefended populace.

The Commander needed a moment before he could continue. "Angkor Apeiron was discovered by Chang Izanagi, of Hathor, in 7626 CE . . . first colonized only ten standard years later." His voice was starting to shake a little like his hand. "I suppose your reference work is quite reliable in these particulars? I mean, about there being eleven million people there, especially?"

Novotny paused for thought, began to speak, then stopped and

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shook his head and tried again. "The EG is the most reliable general reference work in human history, Your Honor—Commander—whatever I am to call you now—"

" 'Commander' will still do."

"—when it is used for the purposes for which it is intended. Which is to say that it was never meant to serve as a manual of do-it-yourself medicine, or law, or astrogation either. It is a means by which one can verify, or learn, a fact; check a date or name; obtain entree to almost any field of knowledge, and learn where to go for further. . ."

"Yes. Spare us the sales talk, we're not in the market for a set right now." Nobody cracked a smile. "Now here in your reliable reference work, which you gave the enemy as a present, are the precise coordinates for the Apeiron system: Sector Omicron 111.254, Ring Eleven 87.58, Galactic Latitude 7.54 North. These figures are correct, are they not? Hasn't the EG a competent editorial staff, with the technical and scientific knowledge. . ."

"The staff at the home office is more than competent, Commander. It is very good indeed. I speak from personal experience."

The Commander leaned forward. "Then what, Mr. Novotny, is going to save the inhabitants of Angkor Apeiron from the consequences of your action?"

Novotny leaned back, somewhat haughtily, as if he had at last taken affront. "Only the fact, Commander, that the inhabitants of Angkor Apeiron do not exist."

There was a silence in the dayroom, as if each person who looked at the speaker were waiting for his last words to somehow clear themselves out of the air, or for some great hand to reach in from outside the little ship and mend the broken spring of sanity.

The Commander, his shakiness shocked away, was the first to reply: "You mean . . . you claim to have some knowledge . . . that the planet has already been evacuated, or wiped out?"

"I mean, sir, that the star Apeiron has no planets. It has never had any. When the berserker arrives there it will find no victims and no material help; and if your estimate of its damaged condition is as accurate as I would like to believe, before it can go on to some other world it will have died, if that is the proper word, of the injuries your crew has so gallantly inflicted on it."

"But . . ." The Second Officer was starting a disbelieving protest.

Novotny rounded on him sharply. "Why do you suppose the military authorities protected six settled planets in this region and ignored a seventh?"

"Lack sufficient forces. . ."

"Bah. Correct me if I am

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wrong, Commander, but would not the general or admiral in charge be more likely to spread his forces thinner, and not leave eleven million people totally undefended, since this sector has become a combat zone? Of course his forces are probably spread all too thin already, which is why I thought it good to direct our late antagonist to a desert system, rather than letting it go challenge some of them."

Ridolfi had recovered, or almost. "Desert system? But this EG entry . . . you claim your encyclopedia is the most reliable. . ."

Novotny was holding up a pudgy, magisterial hand, and his face had eased into something that approached a smile. "I will explain, as I have promised. But to do so I must briefly go far afield from berserkers and space warfare."

His accuser had not yet relaxed a bit. "Do so. Go as far as you like. But be sure that you come back."

Novotny took another moment to marshall his thoughts before he spoke. "Suppose . . . suppose that you, Commander, are a ruthlessly good businessman, back on Earth or one of the other crowded worlds. And you decide that there is money to be made in purveying information to the public, even as EG makes money. You decide that you will compile and sell a general reference work. Or perhaps one more specialized—on galactography, let us say, listing and describing all the inhabited and explored planets as well as other bodies in the Galaxy that are for some reason interesting.

"You decide that you will put a great deal less work into your encyclopedia than we put into ours, and therefore be able to sell yours for a great deal less money, while including the same information we include. How? The most direct expedient is of course to copy all your articles verbatim from ours; but this the laws and courts, alas for your enterprise, are never going to allow. You are forced to the inconvenience of at least rewriting our material somewhat as you crib.

"Given a little computer help, to rearrange the syntax and replace words with their synonyms, this will not be such an arduous task as might at first appear. Even our several billions of words might be rehashed and reprinted, in slightly different format, in a quite reasonable time. Behold! And Commander Ridolfi's Encyclopedia of All Knowledge is available for the home data bank, at a much lower fee than ours . . . never mind that you will not provide your customers with the constant updating service that ours receive.

"So! Even with much rewriting, your basic idea is still illegal,

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still infringes upon our copyrights, does it not? Well, now the answer is no longer quite so clear-cut. But believe me, our lawyers will try, *have* tried in similar cases, to sue you for a bundle, as soon as they find out what you have done.

"Now you show up for trial, and are on the witness stand, though not with your life at stake of course . . . Commander Ridolfi, I the prosecuting attorney ask you: Is it true or not, that you have compiled your so-called reference work virtually entirely from EG? Now think carefully, for on your answer your whole defense will stand or fall.

"Of course it is not true! you answer ringingly. You used the Merchant Astrogation banks, you used periodicals and the records from dusty archives, you looked in books, you queried eminent authorities in many fields, just as does the great EG itself.

"Ohh? I ask, and now my voice is of the softest, and I cast an eye toward the jury. Then tell me, sir, which of these many indispensable sources did you use to cross-check your information on the planet Angkor Apeiron?"

There was another silence in the dayroom, a different sort of silence this time, and death that had all along seemed close was suddenly light years off again, at one with the berserker's wake that faded in subspace.

Novotny felt the difference and began to sag. "Because you see, sir, we have made this entry up, population, industries, discovery date and all, as encyclopedists have made up entries for the same reason from very ancient times. We made it up to catch such plagiaristic fish as you, and put it as bait for you within the great EG, and nowhere else in the great universe of worlds or information storage does Angkor Apeiron exist . . . there are a number of other baits like this one, Commander, among our forty million entries. Quite a few, like this one, I had a hand in making up myself; but how many there are altogether I do not know; no one man or woman knows them all. The ordinary user is of course never going to hear of Angkor Apeiron anywhere and is therefore never going to look it up. If he comes upon it while browsing at his reading machine, he is only treated to a dull and minor fantasy that he will soon forget."

Novotney let himself sink back into a chair that no longer seemed to be a dock above the edge of death. Then he turned his head to a wallscreen showing space, and looked off into the nebular cloudbanks of the Deep. "I wonder if it can even *wonder* how it was tricked, or how it tricked itself. . .I know that it could never understand." ★

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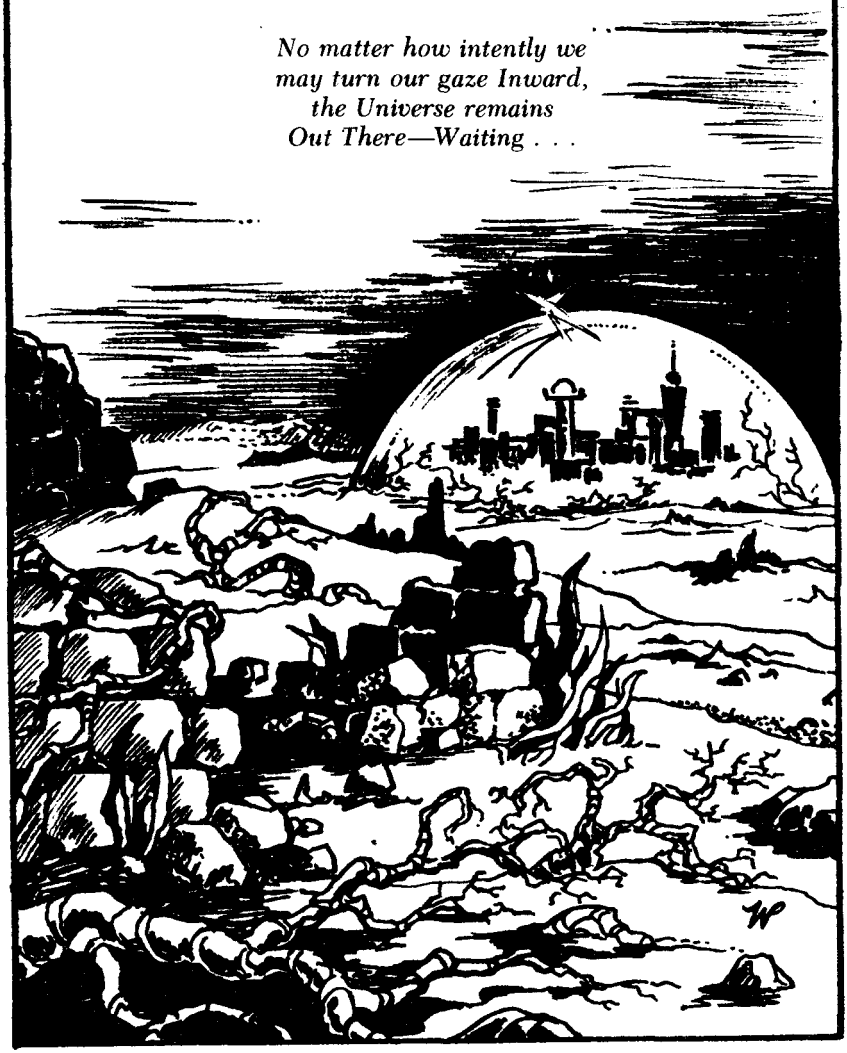
ALLEGIANCES

MICHAEL BISHOP

No matter how intently we
may turn our gaze Inward,
the Universe remains
Out There—Waiting . . .



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I
cleopatra amid the kudzu

DO YOU KNOW what kudzu is? *Kudzu.* Most people who live in a domed city, even the Urban Nucleus of Atlanta, aren't like to know. How many of you have been outside our huge, geodesic walnut? I know about kudzu for two reasons: when I was very little my grandmother used to tell me about it and, more impressively maybe, I am one of those who have been into the Open:

Japan invades.
  Far Eastern vines
Run from the
  clay banks they are
Supposed to
  keep from eroding,
Up telephone poles,
Which rear,
  half out of leafage,
As though
  they would shriek. . . .

James Dickey's description of kudzu in the opening lines of a poem entitled "Kudzu." It's a good description, too, especially the part about the telephone poles shrieking. Not too many standing telephone poles out there anymore, but pine trees, old barns, collapsing fire towers—all of these do seem to be shrieking as the merciless kudzu clambers over them.

Kudzu. Pueraria lobata, native to Japan, imported during a precious century to keep the red clay from washing away. Baroque, vegetable architecture.

My grandmother told me about it before I ever saw it. My last name is Noble, but Zoe, my grandmother, gave me my first one: Clio. I remember Zoe very well even though she lived with us only the last three years of her life and died when I was five. Also, I have a photograph of my grandmother that she took herself, using a tripod and timer: a large black-and-white one. This photograph, which sits on top of my visicom console as I write this, gives me a hand-hold on Zoe's heart and on several generations of the past.

The past is important to me. Just as you have to hack your way out of furiously growing kudzu to attain a vantage point on the surrounding terrain, sometimes you have to rise above and survey the past in order to get the lay of your own soul. Zoe understood that, and I think that's why my parents, after once renouncing her and packing her off to the Geriatrics Hostel, let her, in her seventy-second year, stick me with a monicker like Clio. But, having bridged a generation and walked over that bridge into my grandmother's life, I find that I like my name OK

In Greek mythology, you know, Clio was the Muse of History. (Ta da!)

The piece of history I'm telling now occurred just last year, but really it takes in many more human seasons than just 2066, month of Summer. It's the story of how three of us on a resources-reclamation team, in the employ of the Human Development Commission (the very

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same authority that, nineteen years ago, disbanded Zoe's experimental septigamoklan in the Geriatrics Hostel), went out into the Open to fetch back several people to our Urban Nucleus.

Although I was only twenty-one last summer, I'd been out on three missions before the one this story is about: all routine, all predictable. We'd "reclaimed" a number of people with desirable technical skills or influential relatives in the city by going out, finding their kudzu-camouflaged encampments, and asking them to return with us. Upon the promise of enfranchisement and respectable jobs, they all had: every one of them. They were flattered that an rr team had been sent out for them.

Our efforts were part of what the bureaucrats in the Commission called the "Fifth Evacuation Lottery"—although it wasn't an evacuation at all in the way the first four had been, when the domes were going up sixty and seventy years ago (1994-2004, in case you're counting: a neat decade). The Fifth Evacuation Lottery is another thing altogether, not an evacuation but a series of carefully planned manhunts.

THE THREE OF US who went out last summer were Newlyn Yates, the team leader; Alexander Guest, a man of swarthy complexion although, unlike Yates, not a black; and me, Clio Noble. Three was the optimum number for such teams; it had something to do with an old NASA policy.

Twice before I'd been on teams with Newlyn Yates, and I was a little bit dithery about him: he did things to my sense of equilibrium, sabotaged it mostly. But Yates was all poker spine, set jaw, and unflappable decorum, and we'd never come close to body-burning, despite the opportunities spending all that time in the Open naturally provides. Yates was awfully interior, he was ingrown. In the Open you couldn't get him to uncoil, he did everything as if by an invisible manual. Off duty, you never got a chance to see him.

Alexander Guest, a big, mahogany-colored man with a craggy profile, was probably ten years older than Yates. He looked like he ought to be wearing moccasins and the traditional turban of the old Creek Indians—for good reason, it turned out. Before our assignment last summer, I'd never met him before, never even seen him in the Commission Authority tower. He was just insane enough to *like* traipsing through kudzu; you could tell by the way the wilderness polled up in his muddy eyes. He was insane in other ways, too.

But this I found out in the Open. On the day I met him in the rr section of the Human Development Tower, he just looked bummish and uncouth. We were sitting in plastic chairs in the carpeted anteroom of Yates' office, two zombies rising out of the deadness of sleep at six o'clock in the morning: even so, I had to admit that the craggy, brown man whose bulk seemed to overflow the fragile cup of his chair was

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more awake than I.

" 'Lo," he said. An orotund rumble.

I nodded.

"Looks like we're gonna be team members. You know what this one's about?"

"No," I said. "Do you?"

"Think so." He said this matter-of-factly rather than smugly, but I still didn't feel like asking him the natural follow-up question. So, shifting in his wobbly chair (with him in it, it looked like it had been stolen from a Van-Ed elementary division classroom), he said, "What's your name, Miz?"

I told him.

"*Cleo,*" he said, missing it by a letter. "Short for Cleopatra. Married up with her brother and bodyburned with two Romans. Well, Cleo, you're the first redhaired 'Gyptian I've ever seen. Nice to meet you."

I didn't correct him about my name. I did manage the bogus courtesy of nodding: again. That was all I could manage.

"History's a pastime of mine," he said after a while. "My name's Guest, Alexander Guest. That's how I'm listed in the UrNu census anyhow, and even here at the Tower. Really, though, it's an alias.

"The alias I'd rather go by," he said after musing for a while, "is Menewa. But it's hard to get people in an Urban Nucleus to call you that. All the forms say 'Last name, first name, middle initial.' You write down somepin like 'Menewa' they jes' stamp INCOMPLETE on the forms and send 'em back to you. You see, Cleo, I'm an Indian. The name Menewa. . . ."

Fortunately, he got cut off because Newlyn Yates, trim in a one-piece worksuit and street slippers, glided through the anteroom and into his office. Guest didn't have time to lapse into an incomprehensible Muskohogean dialect: the words "Come in" floated back to us as Yates disappeared, and the Indian Menewa and the 'Gyptian Cleopatra exchanged a glance, got up, and followed their black pharoah-chieftain into the dark.

In the center of Yates' metal desk—once Yates had coasted the false wood surface aside—you could see an illuminated projection well; in fact, that was all we see when we came into his office. Yates was standing behind the desk and he beckoned us to take up positions opposite him. Then he pushed a button so that a map of the transit tunnels leading out of Atlanta to the other Urban Nuclei appeared in the projection well.

"We'll take a transit-car to this station," Yates said, pointing at the map. "The juncture of the Miami and Savannah tunnels, southeast of here. Then we'll have to go to the end of the Savannah tributary, dismantle the filter system on one of the ventilation units, climb through, and strike out on foot. The biomonitor-relay people have one of our targets placed at about forty-five kilometers due east of the tunnel juncture." Yates' father had once been the director of the city's

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Biomonitor Agency, but in the last fifteen years the Agency had extended its operations to include surveillance of the natives of the countryside; this was in addition to the medical monitoring of all dome-dwellers. A *target*, both then and now, was a human being who was being monitored.

"Hot damn," I said. An old expression of my grandmother's. "How did they manage that?"

"An implant tab at the nape of our subject's neck, they told me," Yates said. "A month ago—two months ago—he came into the city."

"Why?"

"The Agency told me he brought a truckload of peanuts up here, using what's left of the old highway system. While here, he was drugged, implanted, and afterwards pumped by a hypnotist-physician at Grady Memorial. He's not aware of the implant tab or the fact that he was questioned."

"Why didn't we just keep him here when he came to the city? It doesn't make sense to go out and fetch him now." I was doing all the asking: Alexander Guest, the gingerbread Indian, was standing hunch-shouldered and open-mouthed beside me.

"The man's name is Jonah Trap," Yates said, irritated with me, the projection well giving his face the demonic geometry of a mask. "A black. But we're not going after *him*, Miz Noble. We're after two people whose intelligence and ability the city needs and who're now apparently living with Trap near the old town of Toombsboro. You were selected for this assignemnt because one of the people is a woman: the Commission Authority believes you may be able, far better than Mr. Guest or I, to persuade her to return with us."

"Why was I chosen?" Indian Alex said, surprising both Yates and me.

"I thought they explained that to you. You met Trap while he was here, they told me; they said you'd even been into that area of the Open before. Is that true?"

"Yep."

"Then those are your reasons. You ought to be helpful." Then Yates said, "And in case the question seems to logically present itself now, *I'm* going because I'm good at taking teams out and bringing them back entire. The fact I'm black probably won't hurt much either, not in this instance."

"Well," I said, "who are the people? The man and the woman?"

"That, Miz Noble, I can't tell you till we're on our way to Toombsboro."

"Why not?"

"If I could tell you that,"I said, "I could tell you the other. Couldn't I?"

"Not necessarily. Maybe the Commission Authority just wants to be sure we don't spread our targets' names around before we leave. You could easily tell us that without telling us the names of the targets."

"Well, Miz Noble, if you have it all figured out, why ask?" Yates was an icicle with an iron bar inside it, and I had just put my

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lily-white foot so far into my mouth that I was gnawing on ankle bone. *Hot damn*, I said to myself: an old expression of my grandmother's.

Aloud I said, "I don't have it all figured out. I didn't even know we had a tunnel to Old Savannah: Savannah's not one of the Urban Nuclei. Never was, was it?"

"It's about one-tenth of a tunnel," Yates said, letting his finger trace the route in the projection well. "A dead-ender. Anyway, the geology of the coastal region wouldn't permit the construction of a viable tunnel, even if there were people there to get to. Same with Miami. Most of the Trans-Seminole 'tunnel,' you know, is above-ground and hooded." He tapped the illuminated map. "Once we exit the main tunnel near the Ocmulgee mound here," tapping again, "we'll head down the dead-ender and then surface well to the east of Macon. Then, a kudzu-fouled walk in the Open. We may be able to use the old state highway—57, I think—for a good part of the way. That should ease it a little for us."

Guest said, "That highway's torn up and overgrown, 57 is—at least over here where we're gonna come out." He shook his head. "Crazy."

"It doesn't matter," Yates said. "We'll get there, Mr. Guest." In five more minutes the briefing was over, and Yates turned us out of the office, out of the Tower, for the rest of the day. An open day.

"You like to get some coffee, Cleo?" Guest asked me.

"No thanks," I said. "See you at six o'clock tomorrow morning."

I went back to my cubicle on Level 3, *under*. That's where, a quarter of a century ago, my parents started from: Level 3.

II
the general toombs cornstalk brigade

THE TRANSIT TUNNELS are dark; they smell of the dampness of concrete. Even before construction on the domes of the Urban Nuclei had begun, the entire Federation-wide network of tunnels was blasted into existence by an arsenal of immaculately sanitary H-bombs: grrr-choom, grrr-choom, grrrrr-whumpf! Strangely, we don't use the tunnels that much.

On the morning after our conference in the Human Development Tower, an open transit-car carried us in eerie silence to the Miami-Savannah juncture, where, before we turned into the Savannah tributary, I knew we were passing pretty darn close to the old Ocmulgee Mounds. At these mounds and the territory called the Ocmulgee Old Fields, the Creek Indians had long ago formed the Creek Indian Confederacy. Several prehistoric cultures had thrived here, too.

I started wondering. Maybe the domes of the Urban Nuclei had been raised from the same impulse that had motivated Kheops in Egypt and the Mound Builders in Georgia. Oh, in these two cases I know the immediate motives diverge: Pharoah wanted a

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splendid tomb whereas the Indians wished their flat-topped pyramids to serve as the thrones of the gods. But if Pharoah believed himself a deity, a god incarnate, then his tomb was also a throne, and the common denominator in the two instances is humankind's need to exalt something larger than itself. A religious motive, finally.

Anyhow, that's my belief, and I'm not talking about the Ortho-Urban Church, either. I've tried to voice it once or twice, but these ideas, spilling from the lips of a twenty-two-year-old woman with red hair, elicit only peeved looks ("The girl thinks she's Bertrand Russel, Tom") or curt dismissals ("Sophomoric bullshit, Clio"). So I reserve these ruminations now for accounts like this one. Except I probably won't be writing any more accounts like this one. Circumstances change.

BUT FOR THE BEAM of a single headlamp, our resources- reclamation team rode in absolute darkness. The winds of our blast-borne passage smelled of concrete, concrete and iron. Yates slowed at the Miami-Savannah juncture and negotiated the turn into the southeastward tributary of the subterranean network: Guest had to get out and switch the transit-rails. Then off we went again, the Ocmulgee Old Fields behind us, well to the west. We'd been traveling for three hours.

I shouted into the resurging wind of our movement: "*Now* can you tell us who we're going after?"

Turning his head, Yates permitted his thin profile to carve itself in the air: "Wait till we're out! You've waited this long!"

In fifteen minutes the wind began to die, the walls to lose their dizzying speed, and we glided into what I could only think of as Dead-End Station: yellow fluorescents casting a somehow greenish light over the platform here. You half-expected, when you were close enough to see more clearly, to find stalactites on the ceiling. Didn't, though; too mercilessly hot.

We got out and began unloading equipment and carrying it up to the platform. Yates wore a myriad tools on his low-slung belt, as well as a holster of artificial leather: it contained a laser pistol. (One such weapon to each reclamation team, and the team leader carried it.) Then Yates pointed at the ventilation unit at the top of the tunnel's final wall.

"OK," he said. "Let's dismantle that grate."

Guest climbed up the maintenance rungs to the unit and began working to take the filter apart. The filter systems had been installed when the Federation had been worried about the tunnel's Internal Environmental Control (IEC, if you like initials), fearing that the Open's tainted atmosphere would spill into the network and strangle us with the wastes we had fled from. If that's what we'd fled from. The Open had never been so foully tainted as that. Never. The first reclamation team had carried oxygen canisters and over-the-head masks

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(which made them look like startled rhesus monkeys when they put them on: perforated speakers, plastiglass eyes, and all), but its members hadn't had to use this equipment. And ninety per cent of Atlanta's people still believe you can't go outside. Most of them, if they knew differently, still wouldn't rush to re-colonize the wilderness.

"This thing's rusted," Guest said, swaying up there on the maintenance ladder. "Won't budge."

So yates had to go up and cut both the filter system and the grate out of their moorings with the laser pistol. After the area around the ventilation unit had cooled, we all climbed through, weighted with paraphernalia, into the Open: Guest first, then me, then Newlyn Yates.

And the first thing we saw was the deformed, rearing landscape: green temples, arabesques of kudzu, pagodas to the gods of rampant fertility. The Orient had invaded Georgia, invisible samurai crouched in the vines. The wilderness shouted at us, and the sky—this always amazed me—was a brilliant sky-blue.

THE JOB THEY GAVE Clio Noble was tying flaming-red markers on trees and rotted fence posts, anything up-jutting. "Hell," Alexander Guest said. "She don't need to do that. You got a wrist-compass and I could smell our way back to the station." He lifted his big head and whuffled two or three times at the air, a comic and lordly bear in the chapel of

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What a spectacular year 1974 has been for our science-fiction list—more titles selling more copies to more people than ever before. 1974 was the year of RAMA—Arthur C. Clarke's big bestseller that has already been back to press several times. Hard to keep up with the unprecedented reorders—but we're coping, so that the book will be in stock at all times. . .along with Arthur's classic *Childhood's End*, now reissued and brilliantly repackaged. Look for them both!

1974 was also the year of *Icerigger*, our own Alan Dean Foster's survival novel that took off like a shot and is still outselling most other books in the category. Why? Who knows? Perhaps the marvelous Dean Ellis cover moved the books off the racks; or maybe the cover looked enough like the hardcover bestseller *Alive*; or maybe all the *Star Trek Log* fans followed Foster to science fiction. Or maybe a combination of all these factors—or maybe none. But we think the book sold its bloody head off because Alan is a damn good writer, and sf readers are desperately looking for the kind of adventure fiction he writes so well.

Also in '74, we introduced several top science-fiction authors to the list—authors who, for one reason or another, had never been published by Ballantine. Back in March, we brought out Frank Herbert's classic chiller *Under Pressure*, a little gem that is already in its third printing and has become a permanent fixture on our backlist. Then there was Stanley G. Weinbaum—the best of, that is. Some of our sales honchos wanted to know "What's a Weinbaum?" So they read the big beautiful collection that introduces our Classic Library—and they found out. L. Sprague de Camp appeared on our science-fiction list for the first time in '74, as did Ray Gallun and—you guesses it!—Leigh Brackett! In addition to books by the old pros, we featured several smashing first

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novels by Suzy McKee Charnas, by that crazy cartoonist-cum-author William Rotsler and, lest we forget, by Waldrop & Saunders with their wacky, wonderful *Texas-Israeli War*. So much for '74!

● ● ●

Now on to 1975 and January's big book *The Best of Planet Stories #1*, edited by Eric John Stark's favorite lady, Leigh Brackett. Planet Stories was that late, great pulp magazine of the '40s and 50s that featured strange adventures on other worlds—lots of larger-than-life swashbucklers and lovely damsels in distress. Quite a combo! Here is heroic fiction at its best—a dynamite collection culled from the pages of the greatest pulp sf magazine. Most of these stories have never been reprinted; many of them are appearing in paperback for the first time. Leigh has included by popular demand (or at least on request by the publisher) her famous collaboration with Ray Bradbury, "Lorelei of the Red Mist," first published back in 1946 and now something of a classic. Then there's "The Rocketeers Have Shaggy Ears" (what a title!) and Fred Brown's immortal "The Star-Mouse" (who will ever forget Mitkey Mouse?)! And these's lots more in this big book, not least Leigh Brackett's penetrating portrait of an era she helped make happen. Not to be missed!

● ● ●

Donald J. Pfeil is the editor of *Vertex*, the slick sf magazine. Exchanging his blue pencil (at least, for as long as it takes to write a novel) for a typewriter, Don has come up with *Voyage to a Foregotten Sun*—a rousing space opera. Trader Zim was doomed to spend 20 years in isolation on some god-forsaken planet unless he agreed to accompany the President of Earth back to his home planet in a ship that was 1200 years old! It was going to be a l-o-n-g trip. We liked *Voyage* so much we instantly signed on for his next novel. . .and the one after that. . .and. . ! Don't miss it!

And HAPPY NEW YEAR TO ALL!

the forest.

"Suppose something happens to you, Guest," Yates said. "Or to me. Maybe Clio. . .Miz Noble," he emended, "will have to get back here on her own." I grinned at him, and the martinet in Yates revived. "Miz Noble will set the rags, and that's it."

So off we went, angling northeast in order to intercept the ruins of State Highway 57, Clio Noble tying markers the color of her hair at intervals of roughly a hundred meters—unless the eclipsing vegetation or a turn in our progress demanded them more often. Langorously swinging his machete, Indian Alex marched point. Newlyn Yates, good team leader that he was, brought up the rear.

Two brown thrashers (once upon a time, the state bird) and a logy cardinal. Which was funny enough—in context, mind you—to make me chuckle out loud; in that knee-high kudzu "brown thrashers" was especially good.

"Don't get to laughing so hard," Yates said from behind me, "you forget to keep an eye open for snakes. They love this stuff."

Guest stopped and turned around. "My little brothers," he said.

I glared. He'd almost lopped off my head with his machete.

"'Scuse me," he said, wiping his brow with one mesh sleeve. "It's snakes, though. Since I'm an Indian they're s'posed to be my little brothers: snakes, lizards, alligators, all like that. But I saw a green mamba at the Grant Park Zoo two years ago and got so

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crawly I had to get out of there." His shoulders shuddered. "Went right home."

"If you've been out here before," Yates accused, "you've seen snakes plenty of times."

"Yeah, but I didn't come 'specially to look at 'em." Then he said something both clumsily poetic and, right then, incomprehensible: "This Hothlepoya ain't no herpetologist: no sir." And started hacking again.

We did see some snakes, too—as we always did in the Open. One was a coral snake, up from Florida no doubt, that we gave a wide berth. Guest waved Yates and me around it and whispered to me as I went by, "Hope we don't run across any asps, Cleo." I thought he was being a smart Alex until I deduced from his head movements and inflection that he really did hope that. Literally, he meant it. An asp in Georgia, a creature as alien as that!

At one o'clock we found some shade, a knoll in the forest of pine and kudzu. Some moss actually grew at the base of the slash pine we decided to camp under. For lunch. We drank from our canteens and nibbled at our dried rations.

"Well," I said. "How 'bout now?"

Yates looked at me. "How 'bout now what?" Imperial annoyance.

"Telling us who we've come after this time. I think it's a pretty safe wager we won't leak the word to someone disreputable."

"OK," Yates said. I noticed that Guest, his heavy jaw working on a dehydrated vitamin bar, was gazing off into the distant portals of kudzu, apparently indifferent to Yates' impending revelation. Well, he'd told me he thought he knew what this mission was all about; maybe he did.

Yates said, "Do you know the name Carlo Bitler?"

"I know we're not looking for him," I said. "He was a half-caste demagogue who was assassinated in the UrNu Capitol Building almost forty years ago."

"Thirty-seven. And he wasn't a demagogue, Miz Noble." Archly he said this: very archly.

"OK," I said. "Beg your pardon. Why do you mention him?"

"We're looking for his wife," Yates announced, "and for the son of the man who assassinated Bitler, Emory Coleman. We think the two of them are together. Fiona Bitler was Coleman's teacher in a Van-Ed program for precocious children before the two of them disappeared."

"Great Maynard's ghost!" I was really excited: that's an expletive for thugboys and sentimental politicians. "How long ago was that?"

"Thirty-two years."

"You've got it all memorized! How old does that make Fiona Bitler and the little boy she was teaching?"

"The 'little boy' is now forty-one, Miz Noble, and Fiona Bitler has to be in her mid-sixties. In thirty years people age." Which was about the stupidest thing I'd ever heard Yates say. He was melancholy, though. To cover his emotion he lifted the canteen and

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drank.

Indian Alex hadn't stopped munching. None of what we'd just been talking about impressed him, his eyes still veered away into pine copses and viny cathedrals. When he did look at us again, well into Yates' and my awkward silence, he said, "Toombsboro was named for Robert Toombs, I think." He wiped vitamin-bar crumbs from his hands. "Robert Toombs was an unusual man. Confederate general who escaped the yankees in the last year of the war and ended up in London. Came back to Georgia later, but never would swear his loyalty to the Union."

"Yes, sir," Yates said, annoyance surfacing again. "Old Toombs was a real jewel."

"Bitler's your hero," I said by way of mediation (they hadn't asked for it, though); "maybe Toombs is his. Everyone has his own heroes." I remembered a story about Toombs that a professor of mine had always relished telling: In an early year of the war the old secessionist had bragged to a friend that one Georgia brigade with cornstalks could defeat any bunch of yankees sent against them. After the war the friend reproached Toombs for this bit of brag. Well, Toombs drawled (my professor drawled it, anyhow), we could of—but them yankee bastuds wouldn't fight with cornstalks. (Ho ho.) But it wasn't a story that would amuse Yates, though; so, out there in the Open, I didn't tell it.

"Not a hero of mine," Guest said. "When that war broke out there wasn't an Indian left in Georgia, least not officially: only white men and Negro slaves. But Toombs was a man who knew where he stood, that's for sure."

"Let's go," Yates said. He was already standing up.

"Wait a minute," I said. "Heroes aside, what're Fiona Bitler and that old pupil of hers doing out here near Toombsboro? Strange place for them to be, isn't it?"

Without looking at me Yates began jockeying his implement-lined belt into place over his hips. "Johan Trap's farming out here, the reports say. He's Fiona Bitler's first cousin: son of her mother's brother. When she and the boy left the city in '34, they naturally went to Trap."

"And they've been living out here thirty years?"

"Off and on. It isn't completely clear."

"So why do we, in this funky Year of Our Lord, come out here to haul them back to a place they must've wanted out of?" Which was a question that needed asking. Most of the "indigenous salvageables" our resource reclamation teams brought back to the city had never lived in it before, had never been enfranchised. Fetching runaways was business we didn't engage in. Let the trash go, one of our more intellectual ward reps liked to say.

"To persuade them to return. Emory Coleman's a genius, and Mrs. Bitler's husband's been vindicated over and over again for his so-called rabblerousing. Streets have been named after

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him, schools, housing projects, churches. The woman ought to be able to come back to that. She always wanted natural change, that's why she was a teacher. She ought to be able to die in the city that finally recognized the rightness of her husband's goals."

"Fine recognition," I said. "Implementing the Retrenchment Edicts of '35 and crushing that so-called 'Glissador Revolt' three years back, when there wasn't any revolt at all; nothing physical anyhow." This was heresy, but Yates didn't respond to it. His loyalties were cruelly divided: the city employed him, but his pigmentation suffused him with an allegiance no mere emolument or law could undermine. Newlyn Yates wasn't that sort of human being; a soldier maybe, but no mercenary.

III
rasputin at the battle
of horseshoe bend

About five o'clock on that first day we stumbled out of the green mosques and jumbled pagodas into an open area of sorts. A universal groundcover of kudzu still tripped us up, but now it rose no higher than our upper shins: we waded through it like kids in the shallow end of a recreation pool. Guest raked the blade of his machete through the vines and felt for the hidden surface.

The machete clanged. Guest scraped at the ground-cover. "Well, here she is, Mr. Yates: Highway 57."

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And it was. The vines had simply grown across it. We followed the filigreed roadbed for a while, moving east, and had the easiest time of it the wilderness had so far granted us. Well before sundown, though, we stopped, moved off the roadbed into a copse of deciduous trees (wild pecans), and made our camp for the evening.

Twilight still twinkling in the tall pines and pecans, Yates told us to go to bed: he would roust us out early, he said, so we could steal a march on the heat. We prepared to sleep on the ground.

But tall thunderheads began rolling through the twilight from the northwest, and Yates ordered us to pitch our one-person tents in a kind of triangle, dig run-off trenches, and hurriedly finish supper. The woods began to boom, the branches of the trees to thrash about violently. Huge drops began to fall through the accumulating darkness and the stuttering leaves.

Well, no stars this night; no bloated moon and no vivid, glittering constellations. Too bad. Those are things that make being a team member worth all the agitation of soul. From my two previous trips with him I remembered that Yates had sometimes stayed up all night, transfixed, looking at the stars. (How did I know it was all night? Sometimes I stayed up, too, watching *him*.) Tonight, though, Yates crawled into his tent before the worst of the deluge hit and fell soundly asleep. A feat I couldn't emulate. It was too noisy. And my soul was agitated: we were going after Fiona Bitler and Emory Coleman!

It rained an hour, at least. When it stopped, I looked up and saw a shadowy bulk hunkering next to my tent: Alexander Guest, rocking on his heels in the slow, sloughing, red mud. " 'Lo," he said.

"What're you doing?" I said. Not too civilly, maybe.

"First watch," he said. "Yates gave me first watch. You can't do it proper from a tent."

"Why do we need one at all?" I said. "Nothing out here but snakes, raccoons, and opossums." The answer was that Yates did everything by the manual, even down to assigning watches in the middle of thunderstorms.

"Can't sleep, huh?"

That question disturbed me a little. I was afraid (ashamed afterwards, though) that Guest was going to propose a mutual settling of the nerves, a little easy body-warming as a prelude to sleep. I said, "No. But look at Yates. Don't you hate a man who can go off like that, and then stay off?"

"I don't hate anybody," he said obliquely. Then, staring into the dark: " 'Cept maybe Andrew Jackson. I've never really forgiven Andrew Jackson."

"For what?"

"For the way he treated Indians, you know. When that man got elected President, the Civilized Tribes and ever' other Indian in Georgia was doomed. In ten years, violatin' first this treaty, then that, he had all of us cleared out of here: Yamacraw, Creek, Yuchi, Cherokee. That

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Jackson's one dead fellow I wish was alive, jes' so I could kill him again."

"I'd think his being dead so long revenge enough."

"No," Guest shook his head. "Death is a sweetness, it's the dying, you know, that's the devil-bitch, always hungry for new meat. . . .I wish ole Jackson was new meat again so I could feed him to the devil-bitch."

Death as Goddess, Death as Avenging Female. Well, Indians had considered the white man's failure to isolate his woman during menstruation as the most heinous of obscenities. I could accept the devil-bitch metaphor from Guest even though it would have angered me from anybody else; I could accept it without approving it, just as I could understand but never approve the Indian's fear and awe of a woman in her cycle.

Thinking these things, I crawled out of my tent. It seemed rude to carry on a conversation from the comfort of my bedding while Guest squatted in the mud. Together we drew a log up to the rain-squelched ashes of our fire and sat down. Yates slept on. Should I assure Indian Alex that I was in a touchable condition?

Instead I said, "You told me yesterday your name was an alias."

"Sort of," he said. "It's the name on my birth certificate, but *Alexander* and *Guest* certainly ain't Indian names. I'd be closer to it using something like Alexander X, the way some of them old-time black Muslims did. Like the one who got shot in New York, that Malcolm fellow. He didn't know his *real* name was any more than I do mine—now."

Guest told me that he was the descendant of Cherokee Indians who had escaped into North Carolina at the time of the Great Removal in 1838 and 1839. Somewhere along the line a great-grandfather had taken the name Guest. "The reason for that," the big man said, "is Guest is one of the most common forms of Gist, and George Gist was the anglo name of Sequoyah."

"Sequoyah? The inventor of the Cherokee syllabary?"

"Yep. Which I can read. I got a nigh-on complete microfilm facsimile of the Cherokee Phoenix. The Indian newspaper run off at New Echota up in old Gordon County. Got it back in my cubicle."

The other reason that Guest was an appropriate name for Alexander's family, he explained, was that they were "guests" in the city: none of them had ever been granted enfranchisement.

"What about *Alexander*?" I said.

"Well, that's from Alexander McGillivray. He was a famous Creek *micco* whose father'd been a Scotch trader. If you want to survive in the Urban Nucleus, you know, you can't go around calling yourself Menewa. So I got me a compromise name: Alexander Guest."

"Why do you want to call yourself Menewa? Is that a Cherokee name?"

"No. That's the name of a

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[illegible]

And, talking slowly, he wound around us steaming so that ghosts seemed to be rising from the heavy, carnal earth. Alexander Guest told me the story of Menewa.

By 1812 the Creek Confederacy had fragmented into pro- and anti-American actions; most of the Upper or Alabama Creeks were hostile to the new American nation, while many of the Lower or Georgia Creeks, hoping for the best, determined to support and befriend it.

"A few of these Lower Creeks," Guest said, "was in the pay of the U.S. government. Which you can't blame 'em too much for—since they was givin' up land right and left and jes' tryin' to survive in a turned-upside-down world."

The principal culprit, as Guest saw it, was a half-Scot Lower Creek, a man named William MacIntosh, who led his people in a massacre of the anti-American party of a chief named Weatherford ("Then Scots jes' seemed to have a way with the Indian gals") after Weatherford had directed his own massacre of the soldiers and their families of Fort Mims in Alabama: a Civil War ante-dating the one that gave the world William Tecumseh Sherman.

"Got all that straight?" Guest asked.

[illegible]

[illegible] and [illegible] called the Red [illegible] [illegible] [illegible]

him, either. Menewa woke up in the middle of the night. He crawled to the river, found him a canoe, and floated down the Tallapoosa to some of the women and children who'd hidden themselves there. Made it alive, too."

"Sounds as tough as Rasputin," I said.

"Sure. Far as survivin' goes, anyhow. But the real Rasputins at the battle of Horseshoe Bend was Jackson and MacIntosh. They took all the Red Sticks' land, all of Menewa's goods and property, too, and MacIntosh probably went off thinkin' he'd finished Menewa for good."

"He hadn't?"

"It took thirteen years, but Menewa got his revenge. Yessir!"

In 1825, against both Creek custom and law, MacIntosh ("who was gettin' paid regular from the state, mind you") ceded to Georgia all the Creek land that hadn't already been signed away in past treaties.

"So the Creeks, the big miccos who hadn't been talked to, got together and decided to kill ole Mac. On May Day a bunch of 'em attacked his house and killed the bastard. His son-in-law, too. A lot of Georgia history writes this up as some sort of tragedy, Cleo, but it was only what the ole traitor deserved. He knew it, too. You bet he did. The best part, though, is this: it was Menewa who actually killed MacIntosh."

Despite this triumph over his rival, Menewa lived out a story whose conclusion wasn't so happy. In 1826 Menewa went to Washington himself to make a

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new treaty. He didn't give up any new land, but he promised the loyalty of himself and his people to the of the United States.

"The land got took over, anyhow," Guest said. "Governor Troup was a cousin of MacIntosh, and he didn't give a damn how many white men tramped all over the Creek and Cherokee territories. He jes' said to hell with this U.S. gov'ment's treaty, and pretty soon some of the Creeks was beggin' for food or livin' in the woods and swamps and tryin' to get by there. Coweta Town, the capital of the Lower Creeks, was full of white land speculators, Cleo, and finally a micco named Eneah Emathla got some of the Creeks together to fight it. That's when Jackson, who was now your president, you know, told his secretary of war to send troops in and smash up this 'rebellion.' Know who helped the white soldiers do it, Cleo?"

Cicadas were whirring in the undergrowth; the night sky looked like a dyer's vat full of torn bed sheets. "Not Menewa?" I said.

"Yep. Him and about two-thousand of his followers."

"Why?"

"Because in '25, you know, he'd pledged his loyalty to the U.S. gov'ment. He'd even taken to wearin' a general's uniform, standard army style, and someone in Washington promised him and his followers they wouldn't have to trek off to Oklahoma like the rest of them."

"He sold out his people," I said.

"He kep' his word. And the gov'ment broke its. They marched Menewa, a battered ole man, off with all them others, never to come back. And some who saw that ole Red Stick say he wept to go."

"Look," I said. "He put his abstract honor above the material well-being of the Creeks. He gave his allegiance foolishly, then acted upon it foolishly."

"Damn straight," Guest said, "considerin' who he gave it to. They never once put their, uh, abstract honor above material well-being." Groaning like an arthritic septuagenarian, he stood up and kicked languidly at the muddy ashes of our fire.

Questioningly, I looked up at him.

"Your watch, Cleo," he said. "You can wake Yates in a coupla hours." Then he lumbered over to his rain-sopped tent, took off his boots, and went to bed.

IV

aldebaran above, alighieri below

That night I got about two hours sleep. We borke camp at four in the morning and moved out: eastward on kudzu-carpeted Highway 57. In thirteen hours we probably traveled about thirteen old-style miles. (Twice we saw buckshot-riddled, rusted signs saying things like Gordon 12, Irwinton 21.) The going was so bad because in places the asphalt had crumbled like a stale graham cracker; briary thickets had reasserted their primacy.

A little after Gordon 12, Irwin-

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ton 21, upon which I had tied a red marker, I said, "There's got to be a better way."

"Like what?" Yates said.

"How about a helicraft?"

"There's two in the whole city now. Besides, some redneck out here would open fire if he saw one."

Having got a little beyond the junction of Highways 57 and 18 (the latter of which led to the old town of Gordon), we stopped in the evening and made camp again. Five o'clock or so. While gathering firewood with Guest, I asked him if he had known that our "targets" were Fiona Bitler and Emory Coleman. Through an opening in the trees I could see Yates shedding his gear and ragging rubbish out of the circle of our proposed encampment. To me, it seemed a good idea to know where he was.

Not, however, to Guest. "Sure," he rumbled. "I knew."

"How?" My voice was quieter than the Indian's: a shush by means of example, I hoped.

"I was the one that met Trap when he come into the city. I'm not employed by the Human Development Commission, you know. Usually I work at one of the dome's receiving points. It's a job you can't do if you're enfranchised, you might get corrupted off the True Path."

"But Yates said you'd been out in this area before."

"Have. But not any team member on a rr squad. Since I work at the old Interstate 20 Receiving Point, I'm also a agent between the city and some of the farmers out there. There ain't a single self-sufficient Urban Nucleus in the whole Federation, spite what the councilmen and ward reps say. Amazes me some people don't believe the truth of *that*. Anyhow, I've been into the Open beaucoups of times.—And a few miles from here we ain't gonna have to wade through kudzu no more. Wouldn't've had to do *any* of this if the city wasn't so set on motherhennin' its chicks."

"Did you set Trap up for his drugging?"

"I did. But that business about puttin' a implant tab in his nape is jes' a lot of eyewash. Yates thinks it happened, but it didn't. Hell, *I* knew where the man lived, and the fellows at Grady Memorial got all the other information out of him with the hypnotizin', and the drugs too. Surprised 'em, what he had to say. You see, I got a friend at the hospital."

"Why'd you set Trap up? He must've trusted you."

"'Cause enfranchised or not, I had to sign a oath to carry out the city's biddin'—in all things, you know—before they'd even give me a job." Holding two fistfuls of dry kindling, my gingerbread Indian paused and looked intently at me. "And, Miz Noble, I put my name on the paper. I put my name on the paper—with no one sayin' he'd scalp me if I didn't." He started to turn.

I caught his elbow. "Do you know why the authorities want Mrs. Bitler and Coleman back in the city?"

"Probably not for a ticker-tape

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parade, Miz Noble."

"Then what?"

"Old Trap told the doctors his cousin and her pupil, who calls himself Nettlinger now instead of Coleman (Nettlinger was his real father's name, you know, and he was the fellow who shot Bitler)—anyhow, Trap said they'd spent several years in New Free Europe: to be eggzac', the Scandinavian Polity. That's dangerous. Now they're both back, the infection might spread—sort of like kudzu, I guess."

"So what will the city do?"

"Question 'em, lock 'em up someplace. Maybe worse. I don't know." Guest broke free of me this time, and of my questioning, and made his heavily delicate way back to the clearing, where Yates had begun, with the fuel he had gathered, to boil some drinking water. I just stood there. Oh, Grand Zoe, what a picture of perplexity I would have made, what a study in bewilderment.

HANGING OVER the trees like lamps, stars abounded that night: they freckled the matte sky with gold, silver, silver-blue, red: a carnival of constellations. It was splendidly gaudy, like a gauche hat.

Yates, propped up on his elbows and forearms, his head thrown back, began without prompting to talk:

"Before I'd ever been into the Open, I used to dream about doing what we're doing now. Seeing the stars firsthand; not on film, or in picture-books, or done up by some crazy foreigner with rings and haloes around them, like they showed us in art-appreciation class. I wanted real stars, just like these.

"Even inside the dome I felt connected to them, you know: they were like missing parts of my body the nerve ends wouldn't let me forget. Or maybe like pulled teeth that had little radio transmitters inside them, so that even when they'd been dropped down the disposer-converter in some dentist's office, they still kept sending me messages: an all-the-time toothache, no matter what I did. So I tried everything I could to get close to them, to the stars on the Other Side. They had something to tell me, you know, gaps to fill in.

"When I was fourteen a man who worked for my father in the Biomonitor Agency—his name was Ardrey, I won't forget that—started taking me combcrawling: you know, using girderboots and mesh gloves, expensive magnetized equipment, to climb over the inside of the dome. Scary as it could be, even when you was just practicing easy assaults out on the perimeter of the city and doing a lot of vertical climbing instead of hanging upside-down over the whole skyscape. I did that, too, though. Partly so Ardrey wouldn't think I was a baby, but mostly because combcrawling, when I did it, I felt like I was pressing myself that much closer to the real sky outside and the stars hiding behind the dome. The dome was just another skin to get through, and I tried to get through it combcrawling, scared

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as I was.

"Then Ardrey and I had an argument. It was about this old woman who died on Level 9, *under*. Since he worked for the Bio Agency, he had her cubicle burned out—even though she had the whole thing made up like the inside of a spaceship. Neatest and craziest thing I ever saw. We'd gone down there because I'd challenged Ardrey to go look at a deader in person. I think I thought dying was one way to get outside the dome, scarier even than comberawling but probably more effective, too. Anyway, Ardrey ordered this spaceship-cubicle she was living in, with these fake viewscreens of planets and stars, eaten up by flame-torches and refurbished for a new occupant. I hated him for doing it, I called him names. Stopped comberawling, too; just never went with him no more. My father had to sell back all the equipment he bought me.

"Three or four years later Ardrey was killed in a comberawling accident. Now it's outlawed, nobody can do it. And I'm sorry I never made it up with that man, know-it-allish as he liked to act. Ardrey just did what my father would have ordered him to do if Ardrey hadn't gone ahead and done it himself. Simple as that.

"Now I don't have to comberawl to get close to the stars; don't have to pretend some old woman's busted dreams are going to get me closer. Just look up, there they are—making ny nerve ends tingle and my toothache throb even worse than when I couldn't see them. Can you tell me, why is that? Sitting here looking at them, I ache ten times as bad as when I was fourteen years old and girderclimbing in order to press myself right through the skin of the dome to the torn-off pieces of myself: ten times as bad. Now why is that? Can you tell me, why is that?"

But he didn't really expect an answer, and Alexander Guest and I, sipping at our metal cups of insta-caffe, didn't break the silence. The Ferriswheel lights in the sky kept turning.

YATES ROUSTED US out early the next morning, before sunrise, and we were on our way again. In two hours' time, just as the sun had begun to send sparkles through the foliage, the foliage itself fell away and we were staring at cleared fields. Too, the kudzu on 57 had been hacked aside and contained. We walked out of the vines and onto a recently compacted and graveled surface. On previous trips into the Open I had never seen anything like this, no manicured roadbeds and certainly no cultivated fields the size of these: garden plots and arbors I'd seen, but not farms, not grazing land. Well, Guest had hinted at such a possibility.

"Can I stop stringing up these silly rags?" I asked Yates. The road stretched out before us like an invitation, whitewashed wooden fences paralleling it on both sides.

"Sure," Yates said amiably, coming up from the rear to lead us. "This is a 'civilized pocket.'

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My surprise to you, a gift for the two days' slogging we've done." He looked around happily. "They told me it'd be here."

Guest said, "Did they tell you it uz more'n a pocket?"

Yates, sweat in the hollows of his eyes, stared at the big man.

"There's a strip of cultivated land through here," Guest went on, "all the way to Savannah. And some of the towns have people in 'em, too. Not Toombsboro, it don't. But Irwinton and Wrightsville and Vidalia and beaucoups of others. Savannah's got thirty-thousand people, at least. Ships still run in and out of it, that's probably how Bitler and Nettlinger got to the Scandinavian Polity and back."

Blank of all expression, his eyes maybe a little caged-looking, Yates said, "Guest, you're crazy." But he had been hit with an Indian club and was standing dazed on doomed legs: just to hold him up, I wanted to embrace him.

"Wait till you see all the walkin' 'lucinations I can conjure, then," Guest said. "Far as surprisin' us with this gravel road goes, we're gonna run into U.S. 441 at Irwinton—and it run straight on up to old Interstate 20. We could've saved two days and a heck of lot of boot leather if the ole Com Authority had let us come by way of 'em." He spit into 57's loose gravel.

"Guest," Yates began. "Guest. . . ." Then, to both of us: "Come on."

We walked in the sunshine down the gravel road: right out of Erskine Caldwell, we were. If we'd had fishing poles, the scene would have been perfect. Eventually we passed a house, and a man on a parboiled, rustpurpled tractor came down its enclosed drive pulling a flat-bedded hay wagon. After expressing, by his movements more than anything else, his distrust and suspicion, the man said, "Yeah, old Jonah Traps lives on the other side of Irwinton. Get in. Take you that far at least.

Bald and leathery of neck, he did what he said he would—carrying us right into the Irwinton town square, where he let us off. Coming in, I noted that U.S. 441 bisected our own "highway" and ran off to the north, there to connect with Interstate 20 (as Indian Alex alleged) out of Atlanta. Anyhow, by some strange transmutation, we had all traveled into a rural community redolent of the life depicted on old John Deare and International Harvester calendars. (It was popular early last year to decorate your cubicles with reproductions of "Americana." Now I was a piece of Americana myself: a living curiosity. And a curious one, too.) We watched our benefactor's tractor chug around a corner.

"Runs on methane," Guest said. "Distilled from pig's shit, or any other kind of droppin's you care to use."

Yates looked at the Indian with distaste.

"No worse than the city's waste converters," I said.

A few people staring at us from store windows and chairs under awnings, we went on through the

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little town, still on Highway 57, and followed the gravel road toward the site of old Toombsboro. The fields on either side of us waved with beans, or cotton, or corn.

As we got closer and closer to the dwelling place of our "targets," I began thinking about what sort of living accommodations a man like Trap would receive if he lived in the Urban Nucleus. Since most of the surfaceside ghettoes had been razed (they had torn down Bondville in the conciliatory aftermath of the "Glissador Revolt"), he would most likely go under: most likely Level 7, or 8, or maybe even 9. The circles of Dante's Hell, our cynical professor types always called them. Except that in the UrNu scheme of things, the innocent get punished along with the guilty. A few of the absolutely shiftless sort have been consigned to the Big Bad Basement, but you can find plenty of those upstairs, too.

On Level 9, for instance, you have people whose greatest crime consists of being too young or too old or maybe of having only a "marginally utilizable skill," like grocery-stocking or message-running or waiting tables.

In addition, all the unenfranchised live on Level 9, which meant—as I had either forgotten or never really considered—that Alexander Guest had a cubicle in this final ring of our parochial inferno.

What were the sins of these damned, what enormities were they guilty of?

My father would say, "You're a bleeding heart, Clio. Almost everybody's lived *under*, one time or another. Forty-five meters up or down just don't make that much difference."

And Mama Lannie, twirling her chiffon sleeves, would say, "Oh, she's just young yet, Sanders, that's how she's supposed to feel."

As if sympathy were a glandular condition like acne. So that I would go off remembering how Dante had put the perpetrators of passionate crimes in less abysmal circles of Hell than those who had committed sins of malice and fraud. Which meant, to me anyhow, that whereas I ought to be sentenced only to Level 7 for killing my parents in an idealistic rage, Atlanta's councilmen and ward reps—for their manifold, premeditated treacheries—ought to find brimstone and pitchforks waiting for them on our two nethermost strata. Sayeth Dante, it is more heinous to abuse the intellect, which separates us from the beasts, than to abuse the emotions. Therefore, I was proud of my overactive and probably misfunctioning glands.

On Highway 57, without ever having met him, I was proud of Jonah Trap for shunning the whale's belly of the Urban Nucleus and forging a life for himself and his family in the Open. A black man—a poorly educated black man, mind you—in the renovated plantation house of a one-time "marster." No Level 9 for him, no Level 9 for his brood.

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V
sesame street down on marster's plantation

When we reached Trap's house, we paused before it like astronauts on the rim of an unexpectedly quartz-shot, lunar crater. In awe we stood there, or at least Yates and I did. From the graded roadbed we looked across a lake-sized lawn whose far edge, immediately before the ante bellum mansion itself, was dominated by two gnarled, top-heavy oaks. *His* and *her* trees, they'd been called in New England: one for the Master and one for his Dame. Pools of shade undulated on the grass. The mansion had a portico supported by four Doric columns, and beyond the living complex—which included a neat, single-story structure off to the right—you could see the beginnings of terraced red fields.

A shieldlike, wooden sign on the gate by the roadbed said Phoenix Plantation. A series of starlike points on the sign had been connected to make this figure:

"What's that?" I said.

"The constellation Cygnus," Yates replied without a second's hesitation. "Sometimes called the Swan, or the Northern Cross. But it could be a phoenix, too, I guess; any sort of firebird that's born again every night."

A breeze rocked the sign. It was only nine o'clock or so in the morning, and I felt like *I* had been born again, right there on the edge of Jonah Trap's lawn: the Athena of Noble stepping from the sundered, feverish forehead of Newlyn Yates. Indian Alex, unperturbed by all this, was our staid midwife.

"Well, let's go see if anybody's home," I said. And I struck out up the long, circular drive that passed behind the oaks in front of the mansion. Scufflings behind me indicated that I was being followed.

A venerable-appearing black woman answered my knock at the wide, shaded door. I asked for Jonah Trap. She introduced herself as. . .Fiona Bitler, cousin of the man who owned the Phoenix Plantation; and without asking us who we were she invited us in, graciously.

Waxed parquetry in the anteroom. An enormous chandelier. An imposing, carven china cabinet. Silence and coolness such as you might anticipate finding in an Ice Palace. And then, as we trailed the shorts-clad woman into an adjoining room (I hope I have legs that good when I'm sixty-five, and that they don't interfere with my looking venerable): the altogether incongruous sounds of children laughing.

"Come sit down with us," Mrs. Bitler said. "We've just started school for Jonah's grandchildren. As for Jonah, you'll have to wait till noon to see him."

School.

For the first time since coming into the Open together, Yates and Guest exchanged a sympathetic glance—but, along with me, they followed their hostess through the sliding wooden doors to the left of the long foyer and into an ele-

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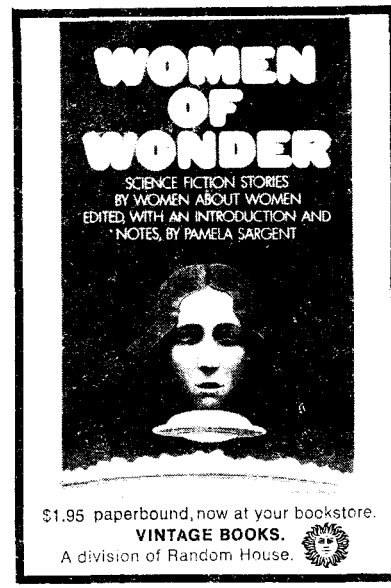
gant, high-ceilinged "classroom." Mrs. Bitler motioned us to a row of rocking chairs behind the five black children, three boys and two girls, who were sitting on the floor and who did not turn their heads as we entered. Their gazes were fixed on the screen of a videoplayback unit mounted on a high metal stand. Since I saw no electrical outlets or fixtures in the entire room, the complex must have drawn its power from batteries. The power source made no difference to the kids; they were successively intent, bemused, apprehensive, raucous, puzzled, and quietly delighted, all in accord with the images unwinding on the screen and the sounds sputtering out of the unit's speakers. A school of no little gaiety.

I leaned forward to watch: puppets, cartoons, animal films, adults singing and talking with children, letters and numbers flashing by, all of it spliced together with quick cuts and remarkable élan. Indian Alex, whose chair rested on the hardwood floor instead of the rug, had to keep himself from rocking in time to the activity: his movements made the floor squeak. Yates, holding himself erect (tricky in a rocking chair), just looked bewildered.

" Public Broadcasting Service program antedating the domes," Mrs. Bitler told us. "When I worked with the Van-Ed people over thirty years ago, we had limited access to this series—for historical as well as educative purposes. You had to give cause for wanting the tapes, and sign for them—but you could get them. The year after I left, the tapes were proscribed; nobody got to use them, not for any reason."



On the screen two puppets, apparently outer-space creatures, were examining a telephone. They bobbed up and down, their googly eyestalks bouncing, and made high-pitched, repetitive noises: "Yip yip. . .yip yip yip. . .yip yip." Trap's grandchildren, all of them under six, I'd say, were giggling. When the video-taped telephone rang and the unearthly creatures plunged out of sight in panic, the kids guffawed and bounced about and cuffed each other. Guest was laughing, too: a close-mouthed, resonating chuckle.

"Is that educational?" Yates said.

"In a way, I suppose," Mrs. Bitler said. "It's certainly *funny*." A

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new sequence was on now, though: an animated alphabet, each letter surrealistically metamorphosing into the one following it.

"How did Mr. Trap get these tapes?" I asked.

"He bought them from a man whose father had taken them from an educational television station in the evacuated university town of Athens. The video equipment Jonah had put together by an electronics hobbyist in Savannah. He has almost two years' worth of these tapes; he used them to start Gabriel's and Michael's education, not knowing what else he could do for them. Jonah can read, but only just."

We watched for fifteen or twenty minutes. Although Guest was engrossed in the program, Yates still had not loosened up. I touched the arm of Mrs. Bitler's chair and said, "We didn't come only to see Mr. Trap. We came to see and talk to you also, Mrs. Bitler, and the man you took out of the city with you in '34. Gerard Coleman. Gerard Nettlinger. Whichever of those names he goes by now." Yates, whose reaction I had been unsure of, looked past Mrs. Bitler at me with an expression suggesting gratitude: I'd done something right!

"How did you know we were here?" she asked. "We haven't been, you see, for that terribly long: two or three months. In fact, Emory's been to Europe and back—again—since we arrived here in. . .what?. . .the middle of April?" That was old-style dating, not one of the Federation's "seasonal" months.

Yates glanced at Guest as if surprised by the big man's prescience: hadn't Guest, just that morning, mentioned the Scandinavian Polity?

"We learned Trap was your cousin," I said, "and just supposed you would be here."

Fortunately Mrs. Bitler did not ask how we had learned that Trap was her cousin or how we had known where he lived. "Well," she said instead, "you don't have to wait till noon to talk to me. This is almost over." We waited. When the program ended, she turned off the video-playback unit, then called to the children's mothers, who had been at the back of the house in the kitchen. Casta and Georgia, their names were. They nodded politely to us and herded their children into the wing of the house giving off the classroom. Mrs. Bitler led us through another high-ceilinged room to the cool, grey kitchen they'd just evacuated.

"This is a good place to talk," she said, and we all sat down at a round oaken table.

THROUGH THE screened-in porch behind the kitchen I could see a grape arbor in the back yard, a portion of the cultivated field we had seen from the road, and an adjacent orchard beyond the arbor. these were peach trees, Mrs. Bitler said, and that's where the men were, out there picking the fruit. Trap and his family were people who still divided their labors into men tasks and women tasks. That was the only

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relic of unenlightened agrarian life predisposing me against them, and Fiona Bitler, a woman who had lived once in the shadow of her husband's passionate crusading, didn't seem at all perturbed by the dichotomy. A breeze lifted the kitchen curtains, and the planet seemed to stretch out around us like a new Eden (the man-and-maiden opposition still sadly intact). In comparison, though, most of the other "indigenous salvageables" we had gone out after had been living like ferreting beasts.

Yates said, "Where *is* Mr. Coleman, Mrs. Bitler?"

"It's Nettlinger now. When he was old enough to decide for himself, he began using his real father's name again." Another of Guest's assertions corroborated. "At any rate, he's asleep. You're not likely to see him until this evening; he functions best at night, and, like an owl, that's when he comes out."

"He uses the name of the man who assassinated your husband?" Yates asked, his long, nervous hands poised on their fingertips over the table.

"It's his father's name, isn't it?" said Guest, who was leaning back in his chair, hands clasped at his middle. "Whose name you want him to use? Whose name *you* use?"

I could see Yates emotionally staggering, first from Mrs. Bitler's revalation, then from Guest's midlly delivered, but unexpected assault: so vulnerable under the obsolete, martial armor he affected in the field. "But his mother remarried," Yates countered, looking from the composed Indian to the composed black woman, "and his new father officially adopted him."

"Yes," Mrs. Bitler said.

"Well, do you approve of the change? From Coleman to the name of your husband's assassin?" His hands looked as if they would momentarily flee from him.

"As a boy Emory had no say in the matter. The name was changed, lipity lip, just like that. Later he decided on the other. My approval—your approval—anyone else's approval—is beside the point." She looked at Yates. "Isn't it?"

"But how did it make you *feel*?"

"Emory isn't his father, Mr. Yates, but his father lives in him. We don't renounce our pasts out of hand, even if we don't like them. We don't renounce our origins, our birthrights, our kindred. We acknowledge them at least. Then, if we don't like them, we move away from them into our selves." Fiona Bitler laughed. "Now, that's the sort of didactic pronouncement only a queen or a comfortable old whore can get away with, I give you leave to classify me as you like."

"A B C," a thin voice said from the door. "E F G." It was one of the kids who'd been watching the video-playback unit: a boy wearing only a pair of cotton underpants. He didn't look much more than two.

Fiona Bitler motioned the child to her, and he climbed into her lap. "This is Carlo," she said. "Jonah's youngest grandchild."

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She introduced us all around.

"Hello, Carlo," I said.

The boy looked me directly in the eye. "A B C," he said seriously. "E F G. . .H I J K." Pausing in the appropriate spots, he continued successfully to the end.

"Carlo has a twenty-six letter vocabulary," Mrs. Bitler said. The namesake of her dead husband, the boy stayed in her lap for the rest of our conversation, occasionally reciting his letters in a voice that didn't disrupt Mrs. Bitler's narration but provided a contrapuntal undercurrent to it. And she took us back to 2034:

"I KIDNAPPED EMORY," she began. "Before that, I worked very hard to put myself in a position to teach the boy, not knowing exactly what I would do once I achieved this goal. I had followed Emory's development from only a month or two after Carlo's death down to the moment he was placed in my Van-Ed classroom, you see, and I felt an affinity with him for several reasons, not merely because he was the son of my husband's murderer.

"Maybe one reason was maternal: Carlo and I had never had any children. Planned them, yes, but never had them. The strongest motivation, though, was the fact that Emory and I shared a similar questionable blessing: precociousness. It had brought me to the attention of the Education Authority of the Human Development Commission at the age of four and lifted my entire family out of the Bondville ghetto into Tower housing. But that was just after the dome was completed, before the gradual return of a claustrophobically bred repressiveness. I don't know what it accomplished for Emory, this precociousness, until he was accepted into one of the special-education programs. I know that his mother and her new husband, John Adam Coleman, lived in a Level 5 cubicle, *under*. So it didn't accomplish for his family what it had once accomplished for mine.

"He was eight when I met him for the first time, a thin, spindly, almost palsied-looking little boy who could have passed for an autistic child except for his occasional lapses into sociability. He liked to draw, almost always in black or purple crayon, and sometimes he would come out of his corner to show us these productions. Mockery, some of these drawings seemed.

"Toward the end of that year —the only one we had together inside the dome—he must have discovered who I was, what oblique relationship I had to him. After that, mockery emerged in his actions as well as his drawings. He insisted on dragging odd reminders of his father, Carlo's murderer, into the classroom. The principal one was an old instructional film of his father's: Nettlinger had been a dentist, and Emory, who was the class projectionist when we showed films, would run this film even when another one was scheduled. You couldn't stop him, he wouldn't be reasoned with, and Fiona Bitler. . .well, Fiona Bitler was losing control of things. So I

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[illegible] for it.

"The Van[illegible] psychologist [illegible] assignment [illegible] middle-aged [illegible] disposition [illegible] killer in his eyes. [illegible] Gregory Greer. [illegible] He tried his best. But what happened was, he quickly alienated Emory and wrenched his own objectivity apart by falling in love with me. I don't know which happened first, maybe they occurred simultaneously—but Greer couldn't admit either of them to himself: he was a bachelor, his commitment was wholly to psychological troubleshooting, and he didn't know how to handle a collapse on two fronts, the personal as well as the professional. I don't think I'm flattering myself about the personal aspect of the situation; I may have even encouraged the man—in ways too subtle for me to pinpoint—to relinquish his objectivity. I don't know. I hope to God I never find out for certain.

"The result, oddly, was that Greer somehow threw Emory back into a strange sort of sympathy with me. Finally Greer suffered a nervous breakdown in the classroom where I taught: he came in the evening when nobody was there and set fire to Emory's drawings and the old film that the boy had been showing.

"Two days later Emory asked me to take him away from his parents. He said he wanted to live with me. During this same week, of course, Greer was hospitalized, and my life seemed as [illegible] [illegible] [illegible]

will catch you.
You better git away
you better
git away. . . .

Run, nigger, run,
the paddy-role
will catch you,
Run, nigger, run,
the paddy-role
will catch you.
You better git away
you better
git away. . . .

"A long, bumpy ride to the Phoenix Plantation, right here where we're all sitting now."

She let Carlo down. The boy made a circle around us, touching the backs of our chairs and sometimes putting his lips to the edge of the table. "A B C," he said gruffly; "A B C."

"Nicer here than in a subterranean cubicle," Mrs. Bitler said. "Isn't it? Even if you happen to be a kidnapper."

THE MORNING PASSED much too quickly for me. The two young women, Georgia and Casta, cooked on a wood stove that quickly heated up the kitchen. Indian Alex and I helped Jonah Trap's daughter-in-law put the noon meal on the table, while Yates and Mrs. Bitler, two or three children tagging along, strolled through the scuppernong arbor and part of the peach orchard. When they returned for dinner, Yates took me aside and said that they had talked about her late husband and her own desire to see the city again. "It shouldn't be too hard for you to persuade her to come back with us," he said.

Trap and his two sons came in from the orchards to eat. More introductions. Gabriel and Michael, this is Mr. Yates, Mr. Guest, and Miz Noble. The kitchen was teeming with people, the linoleum floor sighed under us, additional wings on the table were folded into place and dishes dealt out like playing cards. Georgia took the kids into the back yard to eat on the lawn.

Fried chicken, sliced tomatoes, fried okra, fresh cucumbers, fried fruit pies, cornbread, slabs of home-churned butter, well water cooled in the earth. Amid this abundance, silverware rattled and platters of food went from hand to hand as if hovering on their own power.

Looking at Guest, Trap said, "You I done met, Mistah Guest. These people yo' frien's?" He pointed his fork at Yates and me.

"Yes, sir."

"Well, they plenny welcome, then. Will you ax the blessin', Casta?"

Casta asked the blessing: it wasn't an Ortho-Urban prayer, that's the main thing I remember about it. Between mouthfuls of food, then, Jonah Trap got our business straightened out: we wanted to invite his cousin and Gerard Nettlinger to return to the Urban Nucleus, at least for a kind of commemorative visit. (I think I was the bright one who used the word "commemorative.") Fiona Bitler said that Emory had been planning, for several years, to do

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just that: since returning from the Scandinavian Polity two weeks ago, he had moved this contemplated visit to the top of his own personal time-table: he wanted a chance, in fact, to address a combined session of the Urban Council and the Conclave of Ward Representatives.

"Good luck to you there," Alexander Guest said.

"We're both enfranchised," Mrs. Bitler said. "Or were. Besides, I'd think our return would stir up enough interest to invite such a public address."

"A century ago," I said, "the Japanese permitted a rescued hold-out in the South Pacific to speak to their parliament, almost thirty years after World War II." Not one of my better-received analogies. Jonah, Michael and Gabriel, Casta, Newlyn and Alex—they all stopped chewing to look at me: Scarlet O'Hara, Ph.D. in Comparative History.

"That's exactly right," Fiona Bitler said.

After dinner Trap and his sons returned to the orchards. The serving dishes on the table were covered with an embroidered cloth: no more cooking that day. Guest and I, working in wash/dry tandem, took care of the dirtied plates and silverware. But Emory Nettlinger was elsewhere, sleeping out the heat of the day, and the afternoon was much longer than the morning.

VI

long king is to oglethorpe
as yates is to nettlinger

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Mrs. Bitler countered the length of the afternoon a little by giving us a bedroom upstairs and urging us to take naps: "If you want to talk to Emory this evening, you'd better get some sleep."

We had left our gear on the mansion's porch, in the portico. We hauled it up the stairs to our bedroom (the middle one of three in relation to the stairwell) and stacked it on the floor between the room's two brass beds. The beds had feather mattresses, though, and Alex refused to sleep on them, preotesting a weak back. He made a pallet beside our gear and lay down on that. For the first time since we had been in the house Newlyn removed the

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belt supporting his holster and let his constricted facial muscles relax; he put the hand laser under his pillow. Even though all the heat in the mansion had seemed to concentrate itself in this one room, we all managed to sleep. The floors were so rich-city that Newlyn didn't even feel compelled to set a "watch."

We met Emory Nettlinger himself that evening—after the supper Newlyn wouldn't let us go downstairs for. "One meal like that a day is enough," he said, shaking his head almost jovially. "Feather mattresses and fried food, it'll do you in."

Jovial or not, he wouldn't let us go down—until he was sure the Traps had finished the evening meal. Then we clumped in our boots single-file down the stairs and, at Trap's direction, met Mrs. Bitler and her former ward in caned lawn chairs under the "Master's Oak." It was almost twilight.

Nettlinger stood to shake hands with us. He was a short man with pallid skin, close-cropped blond hair making a point in the middle of his forehead, and eyes like bluish ice. The veins in his temples pulsed.

"You want to take us back to the Urban Nucleus," he said. "That's fine, Mr. Yates. We're almost ready—almost—to go."

"Will you come with s tomorrow?" Newlyn asked.

"No. Tomorrow I'm not prepared to commit myself to. Nor would you and your people be rdy for us to leave with you."

"Why not? That's what we came for."

"Sit down," he said, and Newlyn and I took up positions while Alex, free to form, sat down on the grass. "To answer your question," Nettlinger said, "you are ones who have been too long in city pent, and, like a great many other of the Urban Nucleus' citizens, you're going to require some . . . what shall I call it? . . . grooming? indoctrination? before you'll be truly ready to accept us."

"We've accepted you already," I said. "And Mrs. Bitler will find that the city's done a great deal to rectify the conditions her husband once complained of." This was Newlyn's line, I knew, but out here it seemed altogether true, not merely a part of the truth. Alex's fears were exaggerated. —And I was supposed to be "persuasive."

"Maybe you've accepted *us*," Fiona Bitler said, looking at Nettlinger, "but we don't intend to come back to Atlanta alone."

"Trap's family will be welcome, too," Newlyn said. "It'll have to be arranged, but I think—"

"Jonah doesn't want to leave the Phoenix Plantation," she countered. "We're not speaking of them."

"Then who?" Alex said. "We s'posed to guess?"

Nettlinger said, "Do you know where we've spent most of our time in the Open? Not here, certainly. Not here."

"The Scandinavian Polity," Alex said.

"Eventually, eventually. I've just come from there, in fact. But

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when Fiona first took me out of the city, when I was a child, she arranged in Savannah to transport me to relatives of my father in Austria. That's when we discovered that Austria per se didn't exist anymore: the national units we supposed still intact had long since melded into the encompassing political entity of New Free Europe.

"At any rate, I insisted that Fiona accompany me, and we sailed to the continent on a steam vessel someone had christened the *Phoenix*. It was named for one a man named John Stevens had built in 1808! A steam vessel, please note. Lately, we've traveled by air—since the Scandinavian Polity had aircraft which can compensate for the several inadequate, coastal landing strips this 'country' still possesses—but we first left here on a *steam*ship!"

Nettlinger told us that he had acquired tutors through the intervention of a paternal uncle in Salzburg and that Fiona and these rotating tutors had taken him beyond the "kinetic relations" sessions and the "elementary" integral calculus of the Van-Ed program in Atlanta into physics and higher mathematics: wave theory, relativistic studies, subatomic physics.

"Oh, I gravitated to these studies naturally," Nettlinger said, smiling at Mrs. Bitler.

Moreover, he and Fiona had moved his schooling about: from Salzburg to Vienna, from Vienna to Munich, and, finally, when Nettlinger was sixteen, from Munich to Scandipol (formerly Kobenhaven), the designated adminstrative center of the Scandinavian Polity of New Free Europe. Here, his "schooling" ended, and he began work in a research development institution, on aeronautical and space engineering projects that the Europeans, Eurasians, and Japanese had jointly commandeered, by default, from the abandoned NASA programs of the United States.

"Actually," he said, "'commandeered' is the wrong word, since what they had appropriated was neither hardware nor working plans but—this is very important—an attitude no longer countenanced in the Urban Nuclei because of the very nature of these cities, these *nuclei*; it's the eternal opposition of entropy and growth, perhaps even of autism and extroversion. 'Nucleus' says it all, Mr. Yates: Atlanta sees itself, as do all the other domed cities, as the center of its own very narrow and circumscribed universe. And we're afraid that your own gracious. . .acceptance of Fiona and me will not be shared by Atlanta's authorities, primarily because of the argument we intend to bring with us."

"No," Alex said. "They're likelier to accept people than a argument. What is it?"

"To tear down the domes and rejoin the community of men, which is also the community of life." Legs crossed, hands folded, the man looked remarkably priggish: prim as a prufrock. Even so, his voice was free of superciliousness.

Alex put a blade of grass be-

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tween his teeth. "Doomed," he said. "You really are doomed."

Mrs. Bitler said, "That's why Emory's been telling you about the changes in Europe and about the course of his own education there. Since *you* find this hard to accept, you know the urban authorities are going to require some time to become comfortable with the changes in the outer world."

"But they aren't that startling," I said. "Here they are: Europe's become a single political unit, and Emory Nettlinger has studied advanced sciences in three or four different cities." The twilight had come together around us as if guilted out of sequined, navy-blue cloth; fireflies were winking on and off under the trees. Fireflies, stars, and mosquitoes. I slapped at my exposed arms and squinted at the silhouettes of those around me: Mrs. Bitler was rubbing her bare legs as if similarly pestered.

"That's true," Nettlinger said, "but there's more." He suggested, though, that we go inside since the mosquitoes and the gathering dark made continuing on the lawn unpleasant.

TRAP'S SONS, daughters-in-law, and grandchildren had all retired to bedrooms in the mansion's west wing. In the foyer we found Trap himself preparing to go upstairs to bed.

"That owl there," Trap said, pointing to Nettlinger as we came in, "got him a place to stay in that ole overseer cottage. Can' stan' no early-mornin' scootin' about. Do all his thinkin' when the moon shine."

"A clear case of lunacy," Nettlinger said. "Godnight, sir."

"Goodnight." Trap paused on the stairs. "Goodnight, evvybody." And went on up with the step of a considerably younger man.

In the parlor across the hall from the video-playback "classroom," Nettlinger resumed the process of our grooming. I felt even more removed from my own century than I had that morning in Irwinton. The parlor was illuminated by wall-mounted gas lamps, and the quality of the light—shifting, intangible, touched with the influence of lacquered floors and voluted window drapes—made the impetus of Nettlinger's words almost too choicely ironic for comfort. The setting was Victorian rather than ante bellum, and Nettlinger was our intent, thin-faced tour guide leading us into a future that had already been part of the Old World's past. Legs crossed, hands folded, he sat in a chair that swallowed him.

"Did you know that during the construction of the domes, shortly after the turn of this century, men walked on the moon again? Did any of you know that?"

Newlyn's face was tattooed with blue and purplish highlights; he leaned forward on the edge of the striped sofa, hands hanging. "I don't believe that." But he wanted to, you could read the desire in his posture.

"No one in an Urban Nucleus has any reason to believe that," Nettlinger said. "So why should

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you? As a boy, I had no idea that such a thing could be. Fiona had never heard of a moon expedition beyond the American Apollo 17 mission. If *any* enfranchised citizen of the domes knew that an Old World coalition had put men on the moon, he sat on the fact—smothered it beneath the wide, twin buttocks of urban policy and patriotism. My own opinion is that no one knew, that no one in the city's hierarchy would have cared very much even if the fact had been conclusively demonstrated.

"The truth is, however, that continuously since 2023, two years before I was born, human beings have had a large and expanding base on the moon: a base, a colony, a shipyard, an observatory. . . .Enough. You must call it a city, I suppose: oddly enough, a *domed* one. . . . How do you feel when I tell you these things?" His eyes stopped on me.

Since Newlyn and Alex weren't going to answer, I said, "That it's too early for bedtime stories, is how I feel."

"OK," he said enthusiastically, his accent now more European than American Southern. "Expected. Anticipated. How else should you feel? But it's the truth, and it's part of the reason Fiona and I aren't going trotting, trit-trot, trit-trot, into Atlanta tomorrow. The news is a shock, a jolt, it will undoubtedly throw a good many people and some of the UrNu authorities into confusion. And the note of dismay, or confusion, or even exhilaration, sounded by the broadcasting of this news—I must warn you—will only be the minor of that sounded by the rest of what I have to tell you. Do you understand me?"

"We've gone to the planets?" Newlyn said. We've. He was transferring the accomplishments of New Free Europe into the hands of humanity in general. We came in peace for all mankind. (And womankind as well, Mr. Armstrong?)

"Beyond," Fiona Bitler said.

"To what?" Alex said. "To what?" He looked as if he wanted out of doors again, whereas I was proving susceptible to Newlyn's excitement: I found myself leaning forward, too.

"When I arrived in Scandipol," Nettlinger said, sidestepping, it seemed at first, Alex's question, "they had been working on relativistic and astrophysical concepts beyond those that had to do with the propulsion systems for earth-moon transport. Their compatriots on the moon had, in fact, built a prototype of a vessel whose range would be interstellar rather than merely interplanetary.

"Gravitation wells and astrodynamics, metallurgy and stress mechanics; oh, it was a program drawing upon but otherwise divergent from the ones that had established us on the moon.

"How to tell you? My mentor at the institute was Nils Caspersson, and my own contributions were minor. Everything had gone forward extremely well before my arrival, I could only hone—by virtue of my virgin perspective, if nothing else—the insights Cas-

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persson and his fellows had developed over a period of three intensive decades. But I won't be self-servingly modest: I did contribute, I did lend my own quirky insights to these researches. Emory Nettlinger, seventeen years old.

"In 2043 our moon-orbiting prototype was given probe-capability and mechanically test-advanced a range of four light-years, nearly the distance of Alpha Centauri—although on this first unmanned 'flight' our directioning was reluctantly, unavoidably random: a technological embarrassment, I must grant you. But we retrieved the vessel; we called it back to our solar system and confirmed by its onboard equipment, photographic and chronometric as well as proto-astrogational, the very real fact of its advance. The surprise—the great, hoped-for surprise—was the coincidence of shipboard, subjective time and Scandipol/moon-base, subjective time: a round-trip of eight light-years in ninety-three Earth-standard days. Not the negation of Einsteinian physics, oh no, but a kind of ballet kick over the glass stage of interstellar space." Nettlinger uncrossed his legs, pointed his toes, and performed a funny, seated entrechat.

"Caspersson, Fiona, and I got drunk, oh, we got magnificently stewed, we did, in the dead of an old Kobenhaven winter, snow sifting down outside like confetti from our friends on the moon. That's how it was, wasn't it, Fiona?"

"Like confetti," she said.

And I remembered Alex's saying, Probably not for a ticker-tape parade. Right now he looked as unsettled, as uncomfortable, as I had ever seen him: a bear on a lumpy ottoman. But I was too happy for Newlyn to worry very much about Alex's discomfort; Newlyn was a fourteen-year-old gawking about in the spaceship-cubicle of that old woman on Level 9, before Ardrey told him that it all had to be "flame-decontaminated."

Nettlinger got carried away, maybe just from looking at Newlyn, maybe from the simple joy he took in these recollections. He went on to tell us about the concept he and Caspersson called "light-probing," and about its controlled implementation in a "fleet" of operable, manned vessels. "Six *light-probe ships*," he said. "Why, that's a fleet. Who could want more than that so soon? Who could afford a larger investment?" Planned, constructed, equipped, and manned, and all by Nettlinger's twenty-fifth birthday, too. Then broadcast, according to itineraries computer-derived, to those stars within a hundred light-year range possessing the optimum likelihood of habitable planets. Four of the vessels, it seemed, had returned and gone out again with new crews!

"One way to our furthest target," Nettlinger explained, using a word that had a numbing and familiar impersonality, "is only 7.2 years. The remaining two ships—if nothing hinders them—ought to be back in our own

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system before Christmas, perhaps slightly after the New Year at the very latest. All goes well."

"Oh, it's a New Year already," Newlyn said. "You got to come back with us now, Mr. Nettlinger," then turning to the woman, "Mrs. Bitler: both of you. Hot damn, who's gonna want a dome over their heads when you can tell 'em things like that? Hey, nobody's gonna get apoplexy hearin' that, nobody! It's gonna wake up all them mummies sleepin' in the Basement, is all: That's what it'll do!" For the first time since I had been around him, Newlyn was falling into the speech rhythems suggestive of his blackness. But that *Hot damn*: somewhere, some time, he had got that from me, Clio Noble.

"An' maybe not," Alex said from his footstool, his bulk almost shapeless in the pooled light next to the sofa. "I don't see it jes' that way, Mr. Yates."

"How do you see it then, Guest?" They were using each other's names like weapons.

"The only way I can, where I sit from. When General Oglethorpe first landed in this state, to make a colony of it, you know, an Indian they called Long King came all the way from Coweta Town to see him. You know why?"

"Hell no," Newlyn said. "What's that got to do with anythin', with anythin' at all?" He was shaking his head in exasperation.

"Wait a minute," I said. "Let him tell it, OK?"

"Please do," Nettlinger said. "Arguments against us we probably require more than blind enthusiasm. To forearm ourselves, you see."

"All right," Alex said. He looked up at the ceiling: the cracks and moisture stains fixed his attention. "Long King went to Oglethorpe to learn wisdom. He thought God had sent ole Oglethorpe to *teach* the Indians since it was plain the English had more and knew more and must have been picked by Him to instruct 'em. So they gave up some land in payment for the instruction they was supposed to get. Later, the English got *all* the land and the only wisdom the Indians was left with was, You can't trust the English. But it was too late, they was on reservations in Oklahoma keepin' themselves warm with cholera." Alex looked down.

Everyone considered this, Newlyn annoyed that he couldn't give vent to his excitement—which was still effervescing in his head and hand movements. Finally, Mrs. Bitler said, "I don't think Emory's saying we're going to bring the population to the Urban Nucleus wisdom, or even advanced technological knowledge, necessarily. The offer is really the chance to rejoin a larger community."

"Oglethorpe," Alex said, "didn't say he was bringing wisdom, either. The Indians jes' looked at the English and supposed it, is all."

"The citizens of Atlanta," Newlyn said, "aren't going to suppose they're inferior beings in need of instruction." His speech was crisp

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again.

"Who said 'inferior'?" Alex said. "Besides, you're one citizen that's supposin' jes' what Long King supposed when Oglethorpe got here. You're an Indian hopin' these people will take you back to England and show you off to the lords and ladies."

I chuckled, right out loud. And it was really me who had done it. Newlyn gave me his exasperated look, then said: "I think Guest's opinion is an eccentric one.

"A *minority* opinion," I said, and Newlyn didn't know whether I was supporting him or subtly ridiculing him: I didn't either.

"Well," Mrs. Bitler said, "eccentric or not, it's probably a view that will be held, with all sorts of variations, by enough people to make our hesitancy about going into the city the wisest course. You people may have to be our ambassadors, going ahead of us to pave our way. Because caution is called for, caution is required."

"Selah," Emory said. "Selah to that."

VII

the citizens of the urban nucleus considered as indignant desert birds

AT THREE IN THE morning we broke it off, Emory and Fiona telling us that the best procedure would be for us to go back to the Urban Nucleus and explain to the authorities what we had heard at Phoenix Plantation. Jonah would serve as a go-between for later preparations, if these were needed. Inconclusive; all of it, inconclusive.

Alex wouldn't sleep upstairs. He wouldn't say why, but it pretty clearly had to do with the conflict between him and Newlyn. "That lawn looks plenty good enough," he said when we were in our room. "Cooler than up here, too."

So I helped him carry his bed gear down the stairs (Fiona and Nettlinger were still in the parlor as we went by) and watched as he spread it out under the Master's Oak, cane chairs around it like a breastwork fortification. Resembling the hard, sinister, bone under a face that has melted away, the moon had come up: full. I couldn't see anything on it that might be the domed base of Nettlinger's narrative. Just the moon, nothing more.

"Sweet Cleopatra," Alex said to me.

"What about the mosquitoes?" I didn't know why he'd said that, so I was heading him off.

"What about them back there in the Kudzu? We made it, Cleo. I'm gonna make it out here tonight." He kissed me on the forehead, father to daughter. Our feet almost entangled in his sleeping bag, surrounded by cane chairs, we stood there. "Kiss me again, Cleo?" Asking, not ordering.

"Why?"

"Because Yates is gonna get more'n that, even."

It wasn't insulting somehow, it wasn't even self-pitying: only a statement of fact that I didn't at

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that moment believe in. I kissed Alex, putting my arms around the bulges above his waist, the ones my mother always called "love handles." (My father had a pretty good set of them.) Then it was over. Alex sat down in one of the chairs and looked at the moon.

"You know what I want more than anythin' else in the world, Cleo?" He didn't give me a chance to answer. "Enfranchisement," he said. "That's all I want, that's why I do things like this one, come out here and all. One day—I keep thinkin'—they're gonna say to me, 'OK, Mr. Guest, you can call yourself Menewa, and from now on you're fully protected by the Urban Charter. Jes' write Menewa on this form here and drop it in the mail.' That's what I dream about, even actin' as a agent between the city and all the Jonah Traps out here."

"Why?" I said. "What do you really owe the UrNu authorities? I don't know why you must haven't defected and stayed out here."

"I don't either, Cleo. 'Cept that I'm waitin' for my enfranchisement." He looked at me in bewilderment. "Ain't that the damndest?"

"CLIO?" NEWLYN said from one of the brass beds. I closed the door, and he said, "Is Nettlinger still up?"

"Talking with Mrs. Bitler," I said. I couldn't see Newlyn, he couldn't see me: the room bound us together in an indivisible blackness and a summer heat that the moon still hadn't begun to siphon off.

"I think they're lovers," Newlyn said. "Bodybarners."

"She's twenty-five years older than he is." I said, finding the bed opposite his. Did he really think Fiona Bitler was a modern-day Isis, both mother and consort to her own Nettlinger/Osiris?

"How she look to you? Decrepit?" The blackness in the room had crept into his speech: city blackness, Bondville blackness, even though Newlyn had never lived a day in one of those razed tenements. *Under* maybe, but only Level 1 or 2.

"No. Hardly decrepit."

"Preserved," Newlyn said. "What you got to call 'preserved.'" But I was elsewhere, light-probing through my own grey matter. "What's wrong, Clio?"

"Guest. Alexander Guest."

"Look," he said, turning so that the bed springs sighed and I could almost see his face resolving out of the darkness. "That man's a case. All this Indian history, all his foreknowledge of what's gonna happen if Nettlinger comes to Atlanta. And he claims to be. . .what? a Creek Indian?"

"Cherokee."

Newlyn was quiet a minute. "I know something about them, too, about the Cherokee. Indians and black men; co-holders of honors in this world's dispossession stakes. But when the Cherokee got thown out of Georgia, Miz Noble, some of 'em was rich enough to take their nigger slaves on the Trail of Tears. I always remembered that, whatever else of

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school I long since forgot. So if those black people was cousins in sufferin' to the Cherokee that dragged them along, they was cousins *twice*-removed. Did you know that, Miz Clio Noble?"

"No," I said. "Why are you so wrought up?" Our first quarrel, our first real quarrel. Start by using her first name but end up by spitting out the whole thing like a curse: almost flattering.

Newlyn lay back, the mattress sighed, the bed springs clinked. I took off my boots and socks and just sat there with my feet on the hardwood floor. After a while, Newlyn said, "Come over here, Clio. Please." It was seduction by ennui, not as I had imagined time and time again it would finally occur: loving violence and tender rapacity on both sides. I finished undressing, went over to Newlyn's bed, and slid myself onto his naked, clammy body.

Ain't this the damndest? I was thinking as it all unrolled like film footage consisting of nothing but blank frames. Then, head on his chest as he slept, I wondered if I had committed a sin of passion or of fraud. To which circle would Dante, that old anal-retentive, consign me?

After a half hour or so I got out of Newlyn's bed, put on all my clothes but my foot gear, and lay down on the floor. Went to sleep there, too; went to sleep there as if I had been lovingly embalmed by the hot night.

And woke up to the shrill, repeating shouts of someone downstairs, terrifyingly like war whoops from the ghosts of murdered red men: war whoops rising through Jonah Trap's house as if the prelude to a general massacre.

"Yip yip yip!" the shouts came. "Yip yip!"

"Jesus," Newlyn said, sitting up on his bed and swinging his legs to the floor. "What in Christ is that?"

But he was naked, and, answering him nothing. I went ahead of him to the door. I burst into the upstairs corridor to confront only darkness. No lamp anywhere, the hallway too tightly sealed for the spillings of moonlight. A commotion from the stairs, a creaking of the banister railing and successive hollow thumpings on the steps themselves. Continuing above these noises, the war whoops that had yanked us out of our sleep.

Holding my heart, my every pulse beat, in the curl of my tongue, I edged down the hall and stopped on the very brink of the stairwell. A door was thrown open behind me, far enough away that I felt certain it was Jonah Trap, and not Newlyn, coming to provide moral reinforcement.

"Yip yip yip!" the shouts continued to come. Then, suddenly, they mutated into coherent language: "Yates! Clio! Get the hell out of there! Get the hell up!" It was Alex, and his voice was ascending through the foyer and the stairwell from the open door of the Phoenix mansion. Then he started the war whoops again, that strangled-sounding, banshee yipping. I couldn't see Alex because of the shadow of an eclipsing shape on the steps.

No: two shadows, two shapes.

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They changed position and seemed to retreat as if in response to my presence. When they did, I could see Alex silhouetted in the doorway, moonlight pouring its waxy, bone-hard glow across the parquetry, the chandelier sparkling in a fitful run of tiny bursts. Then Jonah Trap was at my elbow, candle in hand.

The shapes that had formerly blocked my view of Alex were not at the bottom of the stairs; they were edging toward the entrance to the parlor. Not stealthily: diplomatically. One of them lifted its head and stared at me for a moment, as if trying to confirm a recognition. The other, its back to the first, looked guardedly toward the open doorway, where Alex had still not given up his hue-and-crying.

Behind Trap and me, Newlyn came clumping down the hall in his boots, and there was movement in the third upstairs room, too.

"It awright," Trap said. "It awright, Miz Nobel, you jes' go on back to bed. I take care of this now."

But I had already taken two or three steps down the stairwell, my weight on the lefthand banister. The creature in the foyer had not let go of my face, nor had I released its: a physiognomy carved out of maple or mahogany, but flexible in spite of its rigid appearance.

Lips that moved. Two parallel, vertical bridges separating the eyes and lips. Two brow-hooded eyes possessing large, hourglass-shaped pupils, one bulb of each horizontal pupil set to the front, the other bulb curving away to the side as if to provide simultaneous peripheral and frontal vision. The eye structures themselves looked like moist patches of canvas set into the wooden sockets of a primitive mask and glued there with a thin layer of mucilage. All of this, every bit of it, hypnotizing and unreal.

Guest, having seen people at the head of the stairwell, had finally shut up.

I took two more steps down the stairs. The other shape turned toward me. A face very similar to the first, perhaps taller from chin to crest. Each creature, behind its head, had a corona of bone or cartilage that extended its height and gave it an out-of-time, out-of-place regality. What were they? What were they doing in the foyer of Jonah Trap's house?

"Clio!" Newlyn said. "Clio, stop right the hell where you are!"

I looked back up the stairs. The number of lights there had proliferated, as had the number of people. Emory Nettlinger, wearing a dressing-gown so hastily knotted at the waist that Trap's candle and his own lantern showed me Nettlinger's thin, white legs, came jerking along the corridor and stopped above me on the landing. Fiona Bitler, carrying another lantern, came up behind the three men now standing there: her cousin, her lover, and Newlyn Yates, who was holding his hand laser trained on the shapes downstairs.

Alex shouted up to us, "They come out of that overseer's cot-

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tage! I saw 'em cross the lawn and come inside! When they started up the stairs, Yates, I started in to whoopin'!"

"Thank you for that," Nettlinger said, sotto voce.

"These are the 'visitors' he wants to bring into Atlanta!" Alex shouted. "This is what we're havin' to get *groomed* for!"

Somewhere in that huge house, a child had long since begun to cry. Without turning around, the two strange shapes below us retreated deliberately into the darkness of the parlor. Then little Carlo came out of the classroom opposite the parlor and stood in the middle of the foyer, dwarfed by shadowy adults and incomprehensible events, naked and bawling. I started down to him, but Fiona, setting her lantern down and descending quickly, swept past me and caught the boy up in her arms. Trap's sons and daughters-in-law appeared in the entrance to the video-unit classroom, too, but Fiona, handing Carlo to Gabriel, turned them back.

An empasse. No one moved.

"We can't take 'em into the Urban Nucleus!" Alex shouted, still from the doorway. He was afraid to come in, afraid of the things he had followed up the lawn to Trap's mansion. "If we do, Yates, I ain' comin' with you! I'll go on ahead and spile over'thin' for you, I'll tell 'em what Nettlinger's plannin', I swear I will!"

Newlyn ignored all this; he looked at Nettlinger. "Starmen?"

"Please, Mr. Yates, put your weapon back in your room. Let me go down to them, they didn't know you were here anymore than you knew they were."

"It's not any wisdom I want to touch!" Alex was shouting. "It's not any wisdom worth goin' into bondage for!"

Several other children were crying now. Mrs. Bitler slid the panel to, closing off the room that the families of Gabriel and Michael Trap had come through. This muffled the noises of their dismay and confusion.

"They ain' seen 'em befo' either," Jonah Trap said, his arm around my shoulders, and, although I had been steelily in control to this point, I realized I was crying. "They jes' like you and yo' gen'lemen, Miz Noble. It take some time, is all; it jes' take some time."

We were midway down the steps, and I could see the two creatures in the parlor as if they were lepers hovering inside the mouth of a cave, cerements for garments, mummy-cloth unwinding from their arms—except that what I first saw as unwinding bandages were in reality the loose, ribbonlike extensions of their incredibly long forearms.

"Yates, Yates!" Alex was shouting, Mrs. Bitler beside him now. "You'd do best to shoot 'em, you'd really do best to take 'em out now!" But Newlyn had put the weapon away (though he hadn't retreated to our bedroom as Nettlinger had asked him to), and Fiona was trying to calm Alex, just as Jonah Trap was trying to comfort me. I don't know

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why I was crying, I didn't really feel in need of comforting: all I can suggest is that I was empathizing with Alex's panicky premonition of ruin.

"Can you believe this?" Newlyn said. He said it as if he believed it completely, as if he relished the spectacle of our astonishment, his own included.

Jonah Trap turned me so that I had to come back up the stairs with him, but I kept casting back over my shoulder. I saw Fiona lead Alex back out onto the lawn and close the front door behind her.

Nettlinger said, "Well, everybody's been given a good jolt, our visitors as well as ourselves. Please, Mr. Yates, you and Clio, go back to your room." He turned to Trap. "It's your house, Jonah. Tell them that it's an order, for their own sakes."

"No one get ordered here but chillun," Jonah said. "But I *sugges'* the same thin', Miz Noble, I strongly sugges' it."

Nettlinger went down the stairs, carrying his lantern. I wouldn't turn back to our room until I saw him go into the parlor and caught one more glimpse of the "starmen" who had thrown the Phoenix mansion into a four-o'clock-a.m. uproar. Then the little blond man pulled the glass-paneled doors to the parlor shut and returned the gleaming foyer to cool normality: silence and emptiness.

After Newlyn and I had gone back to our room, there were no more doors to be closed. Not physical ones, anyway.

JONAH TRAP DROVE Alexander Guest and me back to Atlanta in a pickup truck built so long ago that its fenders and sideboards jounced about maddeningly. In the truck-bed, a load of peaches—since he had to make the trip, he said, might as well do some business, too.

It was raining when we left, so we rode in the cab, not beneath a tarp in the back. West on Highway 57 to Irwinton we went, then right on U.S. 441 in order to make connection with Interstate 20.

As we drove, I kept thinking of all the red flags—flags of warning, now—hanging on the green temples along our route out from the transit-tunnel. Through the wiper-cleared semicircles on the truck's windshield, we could see more vines rearing, jittering in the thin, steamy rain.

The rain finally stopped, and on the outskirts of Atlanta, late that evening, we saw the Northern Cross among the ragged, blown-away clouds.

Newlyn had refused to come back with us. Before we left, he gave the hand laser to Alex and told him it was his. Not to me, but to Alex. And not to slight me, either, but maybe to bridge the chasm between Alex and him. Riding back to the Urban Nucleus in Trap's pickup, the Indian pretty well knew he wouldn't have a chance to use the weapon. That didn't mean anything, though, that didn't matter. After seeing all the burning constellations, we were absorbed into the city through a receiving point.

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Alex's own, the one where he ordinarily worked. Trap unloaded his peaches.

So: one enfranchised team member had defected, the only unenfranchised team member had returned, and Clio Noble, full citizen, feeling an affinity for both these men and even for the vaguely sphinx-headed creatures who had ultimately decided their allegiances for them, came back into the city because—

THEY DEBRIEFED US, Alex and me. And we told them the truth, all of it. Then I quit my position with the Human Development Commission, my position as a resources-reclamation specialist. This was last year. Since then, for resigning with no apparent or at least acceptable reason, they moved me out of my Level 3 cubicle to one on Level 9. My parents have asked me to move back in with them, but I'm an adult now and have kept myself in enough earnies to subsist on by waiting tables in the Gas Light Tower plaza. Mama, bless her, is trying to get me a job clerking at Consolidated Rich's. "Or maybe even modeling," she says sometimes; "if it weren't for all those freckles. . . ."

I haven't seen Alex, even though he's supposed to live on Level 9 too, since our debriefing sessions at the end of last summer: he has dissolved into the population as surely, as irrevocably, as a chameleon into kudzu. I just hope he's still alive somewhere, preferably not in this city, and that he's found some people who don't think he's crazy for wanting to be called Menewa.

Not long ago the chairman of the joint Council/Conclave announced that the widow of Carlo Bitler and her former student, Emory Coleman, would be returning to the Urban Nucleus from a long sojourn in Europe. The spirit of the announcement makes me think that no reprisals are planned; the councilmen and ward reps are touting it as some kind of coup. I just don't know. At the same time, I hope Newlyn comes back with Fiona and Nettlinger, though how safe his return would be is hard to assess. He did defect, you know; for at least a year he renounced the city—and *I'm* living on Level 9 for quitting my job, nothing more than that.

What's going to happen? Sometimes I think about Nettlinger's "starmen" and wonder if this great, mound-shaped tomb of ours is destined to be the cradle of a new community. I see their rough, masklike faces.

And even though we still don't understand each other, you me, or I you, I want you to answer me this: Are we now, all of us, living in Bethlehem? And, if so, in whose tax books must we enroll ourselves? ★

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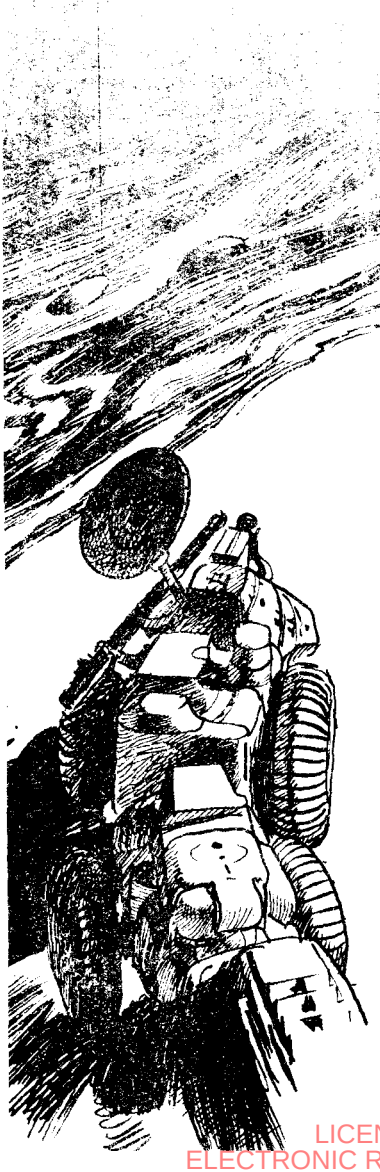

Don Trotter

THE IDEA FIRST came up at a beer and bull session at Jesse Weston's place. She and her husband, Ardee, had been down at the beach that afternoon, and Ardee had stuck his foot on a discarded pop top. He was sounding off at his usual length about where and when it had happened, how much it had hurt, how crowded the beach was, and wasn't it awful how much garbage was strewn about. That's the way he actually talked: 'strewn about'. He's an English lit. major. Jesse had been sitting there, her gray eyes wide, nodding occasionally, when she interupted him:

"You know what would be funny?" She addressed us in general. Nobody responded. What Jesse had thought funny in the past had ranged from a five hundred pound granite facing-

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block left in the kneehole of Thorsen's desk ("That way his feet'll reach the floor.") to arranging for every phone in the lab to ring with a loud, juicy raspberry. That is to say, a very narrow and very practical range. Seeing she wasn't going to proceed without a little prodding, I ventured:

"Not another quarter-ton tombstone, I hope. My hernias still twinge when I think about it."

She looked contemptuous. "That was trivial, and lacking in social significance. . . No, picture this: It's a chilly day this December. All the world, or at least the hardened space-freaks, are huddled around their TV sets. We see through the eyes of Marsman I, who just fifteen minutes before has first set tread upon the ocher sands of Barsoom." (She pronounced it to rhyme with 'Bar Room'.) "Our eyes sweep the horizons of the Red Planet, then fix on a distant hill. Treads churn the crimson grit, propel us toward the summit. We reach the crest, and what confronts us on the other side?"

"Beer cans!"

"Miles of beer cans."

"Acres of pop top plants."

It was practically chorused. She'd telegraphed the punch line.

She looked pleased. "That's right. Wouldn't it be *perfect*?" She hugged her knees and grinned hugely at its absolute perfection.

Kim Sohn spoke up: "Better yet, if the whole place were paved over with black asphalt."

My turn: "Or even better, Marsman comes over the brow of the hill, and there's a little white cardboard sign, on a wooden stake. He rolls over to it, and it says: 'No Tresspassing, by order of the owner, A.M. Thorsen'."

"In that icky orange ink of his." That was Stephie, my wife.

"No, no, not a sign, a stone tablet." Kim's wife, Lee.

"Not a tablet, an engraved facing block." That was mine and brought the house down. Perhaps I should explain that Professor Albert Michaelson Thorsen is "boss" to Jesse, Kim and me, and that his vanity is exceeded only by his shortness. There's a sign on his door that says: 'A. M. Thorsen'. Someone years ago penciled in 'A.lM.ighty' Thorsen. He never erased it.

Kim spoke thoughtfully: "You know, it might not be impossible."

Me: "Kim, do you know what the freight charges on five hundred pounds over 60 million miles would be?"

"Probably enough to recarpet the stadium. Twice. But you know that, besides monitoring Thorsen's life-detection experiment with it, they're using that gizmo of the Computer Science department's to process Marsman's return signal into, among

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other things, real-time TV pictures." That 'gizmo' was the third largest computer in existance, and the biggest one that wouldn't have found capitalism terribly confusing. "It might be possible to alter the output slightly. I know a guy over there who'd love to help out on this, if it's possible." Kim 'knew a guy' just about every useful place there was.

"Call him, Kim, call him!" That was Jesse, looking about ten years old and as if she were having a tough time keeping from jumping up and down and clapping.

We were all just mellow enough for it not to seem unreasonable. Kim balanced his beer on top of a Vietnamese brass elephant, and went to use the phone.

While he was gone, I began to have second thoughts.

"You know, having his name come up like that on national TV would be pretty embarassing for him." In spite of everything, all of us respected, and some of us even liked the little expletive.

Jesse snorted. "The little bantam will bask in it."

Lee came to my aid. "I think Hank's right, Jesse. Five minutes after Thorsen's name appeared there'd be a couple of dozen reporters badgering him. And they'd keep it up for weeks—you know how desperate for scandal they are."

Jesse wasn't that easily defeated. "Nuts, he'll love it."

"And it probably wouldn't do his academic reputation any good. You know how those things are, everybody'd think he'd done it himself for the publicity." I was back on the attack again.

"He probably would if he were to think of it."

My bright and beautiful bride had a suggestion. "Listen, how about if instead of something with Thorsen's name on it, Thorsen himself is there, maybe standing shaking his head at your pitiful notions like Hank says he does. That way it'd be harder to trace who it was and there'd be no question of hurting his academic standing."

"Well, that misses the beautiful symbolism, but you might be right about his academic reputation. Thorsen would sacrifice his first-born daughter before that."

Ardee stuck in his oar. "You're all aware that it would be purest vandalism if this scheme destroyed valuable data."

That sobered us a bit. No one had even considered that aspect of it. And it suggested something else to me.

"And has anyone thought about what happens if we get caught? Tampering with a project as expensive as this one is likely to rate more than a visit to the principal."

"But you're not really going to

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do it are you, Hank," Stephie wanted to know. "I mean, its fun to think about, but God!"

"I don't know if I am or not, but I'm betting that if it's possible Kim and Jesse are going to give it their damndest."

"You betcha," Jesse confirmed.

"I think Kim is looking on it as an interesting technical exercise." Lee turned to face me. "He probably hasn't considered Thorsen or what happens if we get caught."

"I notice you said 'we'. You want in on this?"

"Sure, if there's anything three-quarters of an attorney can do. I think it would be funnier than Hell." She swore badly, capitalizing the word.

Kim returned from the phone in the kitchenette, recovered his beer from the elephant, thanked the beast, and sprawled out on the rug.

Jesse practically assaulted him. "Well, come on—give!"

"OK, the guy I know in Computer Science says that he thinks he can get us what we need to do it. He's going to look into it and come over tomorrow."

"O frabjous day! Callooh! Callay!" Jesse exulted.

"Indeed," Kim said drily.

"Before you get too carried away, Kim, have you thought about what this might do to the data from the TV experiment? And what happens if we get caught?"

"Yes to both." So much for Lee and Kim's marriage. "All we've got to do is rig a subroutine that causes the output of the TV-processing program to include Thorsen's facing block at some point. The output is altered, but the input, the actual data, is unaffected, and they can clear things up afterwards."

I interupted to tell him about the replacement of the block with Thorsen himself.

"Better yet. The Almighty on Mars." He sipped beer. "As for getting caught, we can set up the subroutine to commit hara kiri after its run. Poof! Up in a cloud of random numbers. I know that verges on mixed metaphor, Ardee. After the subroutine is gone, all that's left is the tiny insertion in the main program that calls the subroutine in the right circumstances, and that contains no account numbers or anything else to implicate us directly. . . . . .of course, suspicion is apt to be rather heavy."

"You're not British are you, Kim?"

He ignored me. "The only really hard part, aside from getting the subroutine to give a pretty picture, is getting the passwords that let us make that tiny insertion in the main program. But Georgie thinks he may be able to get ahold of them for us; his father is associate chairman of the department."

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"Sounds almost foolproof," commented Lee. "And I think Jesse's right, Thorsen will love it, although it may be somewhat difficult to tell at first."

I took a couple of large swallows of beer. "Yeah. . .OK, let's do it."

"Okay." Jesse sounded surprised. She hadn't thought there was anything to be decided.

KIM'S TAME computer whiz came to the lab the next morning. The kid looked about twelve, all pimples and stringy hair, and mostly he looked down at his shoes and mumbled, but he seemed taken with Kim, and he provided the passwords we needed. Those, the dust-covered time-sharing remote computer terminal in the corner of the lab, and the programming expertise Kim had picked up as a math major before switching to exobiology were all we needed. A couple of weeks later, Kim had the subroutine written and was proudly displaying his work on the TV display of the terminal.

"Oh, it's beautiful, Kim." Jesse was ecstatic.

"It is, Kim," I agreed. "It's Thorsen right down to the ends of his pointy little mustache. And that's his supercilious head shake too."

"It is pretty good, isn't it." He was really pleased with himself. "Of course, getting it to look like Thorsen was no real trick. The hard part was getting it to appear in the right place at the right time. For instance, I couldn't just have him appear centered in the picture, that might have made him look as if he were floating in the air. And if he simply appeared at some preset time he might suddenly pop into existance in front of some feature of the landscape. No, the way this works, the main program will report to the subroutine every hundred milliseconds. When the subroutine has gotten reports in a sequence that indicates that Marsman is breasting a hill, then it triggers, and Thorsen comes into view as we crest the hill, then vanishes a few seconds later. . .like that." He pointed to the TV display where the subroutine was running over and over, Thorsen appearing over the hill, shaking his head pityingly, then vanishing.

"Doesn't having the main program report to the subroutine require more than a 'tiny insertion'?" Jesse wanted to know.

"Only marginally; and the identifying information still self-destructs with the subroutine."

Jesse was grinning at the display again. "It's really perfect, just mimsy."

"Shouldn't he be a little nobler about the brow?" a voice behind us wanted to know. A familiar voice. Thorsen's voice.

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Kim and I both froze. Jesse rallied to our aid:

"Oh, good, Dr. Thorsen. Take a look at this. We've been thinking of doing some promotional announcements for the educational channel about Marsman. You know: 'No telling what'll turn up on Mars. Don't miss Marsman.' " It was close enough to the truth that I cringed.

"With *my* face?"

"Well, naturally we needed someone distinctive looking—an ordinary face just wouldn't do."

"I'm pleased to see such initiative, but you'd better leave that sort of thing to the TV experimenters. Our own experiment is far more significant; see what you can dream up for that."

He left looking unconvinced but thoughtful. Kim killed the display on the screen, and as far as any of us knew that was the end of *that*.

EARLY THE NEXT morning Jesse stuck her head into the cubbyhole I used as an office.

"Thorsen wants us in his office. He wants to play speculations again."

"What's he doing here this time of day? Its only a little after eight."

" 'Ours not to reason why' ", she misquoted.

Kim was already there, perched on a window sill, mountains in the background peaking over his shoulder. Thorsen sat with his feet up on the desk. Jesse sank gracefully to sit cross-legged on the carpet. I flopped into the only chair.

"All right, you've just been told that an animal about the size of a cat positively and for a fact exists on Mars. What's it look like? Hank, you start."

He was always picking on me in these sessions. The last one, a couple of weeks before, he'd wanted to know what numbering system intelligent Jovans were likely to use. I'd held out for binary, arguing that they'd most likely be built along the lines of fish, with bilateral symmetry. Everybody else held out for radial symmetry, like squids or octopus, and octal, decimal, or duodecimal. Apparently I was to be the goat again.

"Well, to begin with, the results from the Viking probes showed no lower order life, no plants, no smaller animals, no microorganisms."

"No detected microorganisms," Thorsen interupted. "You're well aware that those experiments were neither conclusive nor in some cases even well conceived."

"No detected microorganisms," I corrected myself. "Nonetheless the TV experiments showed nothing analogous to terrestrial plants or animals, and without those to live on, and in fact a

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whole ecological base to have evolved out of, more complex, larger animals are extremely unlikely."

"Correct, and I'd have been extremely perturbed had you failed to bring that up. However, you've been told that such an animal exists even so. What does it look like?"

"OK, say something on the order of a turtle. Low, close to the ground so the wind doesn't bother it, hard integument so the sandstorms don't scour it to death. Black or dark brown for camouflage from predators if there are any, and to absorb what little energy is available from the sun."

"Black will make it radiate better at night," Kim put in.

"Well, maybe it can change color then, but in the daytime it'll be black."

"What about locomotion," Thorsen wanted to know.

"Well, I'd say legs, or something very similar. Wings are obviously out, and sliding or gliding like a snake or snail wouldn't work well in that fine grit. Maybe six or eight of them, with broad, paddle-shaped ends to dig in and anchor."

"Any other limbs, Jesse?" Somebody else's turn now.

"Yes, two of those paddle-shaped feet modified to scoop sand into its mouth." She sounded certain.

"Why?"

"There are only three major sources of energy available to Myrtle: direct solar radiation, which is obviously inadequate, radioactive decay, of which there ain't that much there to decay, and other life forms, our as-yet-to-be-detected microorganisms. I therefore conclude that she makes her living by filtering smaller organisms out of the sand, like whales filter krill."

"You left one out," said Thorsen, and waited. Jesse looked puzzled.

"The wind," Kim helped out.

"Oh, yeah, sure, but I can't think of any likely way for an organism to use that. I mean martians with little windmills on top of their heads would never be

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able to reproduce. They'd be too busy laughing at each other." She giggled, and rocked back onto her elbows.

"I agree windmills are impractical," Kim said, "But how about a sessile organism with thousands of tendrils waving around in the breeze, sort of like a sea anemone?"

"How does it get energy from that," Thorsen wanted to know.

"Say its got two kinds of tendrils, one impregnated with natural lodestone, the other with some sort of conductor. The tendrils are shaped so the flow around them is very turbulent, so when the wind blows over them they whip around and bingo, a natural generator."

"Lodestone isn't that common even on Earth," I put in to show I was listening.

"Make him self-energizing then, like a powerhouse generator, that way it wouldn't take much."

"It sounds pretty unlikely to me."

"Have you ever seen a hermit crab? Or a human being?"

"Let's hear some more about Hank's turtle," Thorsen ordered. "Head, sense organs, Jesse?"

"I'd say a retractible cluster of sense organs. That sort of thing isn't generally very durable. Probably something analagous to eyes, so Myrtle can stay in bright sunlight and avoid stepping into puddles. . .of shadow, and a pair of antennae—feathery things, like a moth's—for detecting breezes. Probably they'd be as far apart as possible when extended to give the most directional information. Hearing would be useless, of course."

"Anything else, Kim?. . . Hank?"

"Well, it might be useful for it to be able to sense changes in atmospheric pressure, and maybe to smell water or whatever it uses for a solvent, but those functions could be in the antennae."

"OK. . .anybody want to add anything else?" He waited a few seconds. "What you've come up with is substantially the same as the result of my own thoughts." He fumbled around in the papers on his desk, then came up with a pencil drawing which he passed around. It showed a creature very similar to what we'd described.

Thorsen had been staring out the windows while we examined his drawing. When I put it back on his desk, he spoke, still staring out the window:

"It has come to my attention that some members of this group may have the capability to make alterations in the output of the television experiment on Marsman I." 'Come to his attention', indeed. I wondered how much he'd doped out for himself and how much he'd squeezed out of Ardee Weston. I was sure Ardee

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was our weak link and sure Thorsen knew it. He looked around at each of us in turn.

"Possibly," I admitted. Jesse glared at me.

Thorsen looked back out the window again. "I wonder if any of you has fully comprehended the power you have at your disposal. Consider what the effect would be if rather than my humble self (!) the creature I have just shown you were to be 'sighted' on Mars by Marsman. Life on Mars! And not just some boring little bacteria only people like us care about, but something big enough to see and strange enough to excite. At the least, the very least (*He* was beginning to sound excited!) it would assure the launching of further Marsmen. And I think the odds are excellent that it would trigger completion of *Ares* and *Stalin*. The cold detente is just starting to heat up, and a joint manned Mars mission could be just the thing to fan the flames. But the citizens of neither country would pay for it without there being something up there to excite their interest." He had a strange look in his eyes, a dreamy look I had never seen before. All at once, I realized: *I'll be damned, the Almighty wants to be an astronaut*. But if he could get the manned mission revived, he probably had a pretty good chance; he was about the top exobiologist in the country. A lot of other things fell into place too. All that jogging he did, for instance, and that biplane he was so fond of buzzing football games in. But he was still talking:

"We've been tending to turn more and more inwards the last decade. There's been little in space to capture the public's imagination so appropriations have been waning. We must do something like this to turn attention outwards or mankind will remain forever earthbound." He realized he was getting uncharacteristically poetic, and turned toward Kim briskly. "Well, Kim? I think you are probably handling the nuts and bolts of this."

Kim looked at Jesse and me, then replied. "Sure, we can do it, but why not go all the way, have John Carter gallop up on a thoat?"

"Don't be ridiculous."

"The whole idea is ridiculous. Do you really think that if something like this," he brandished the drawing he'd picked up from the desk, "wanders across the landscape the actual data from Marsman won't be checked and rechecked, processed and reprocessed, trying to get every possible shred of detail? And that when it is, the hoax won't be discovered, and the whole space research program totally discredited. Then watch your appropriations wane!" Kim was as angry as I'd ever seen him.

"I've considered that with the

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most extreme care, Kim, and I feel that the chances of our being found out are very small." He grinned. "I had a few drinks with the chairman of the Computer Science department at the faculty club last night. Once the data from Marsman is in the computer, there's literally nothing that can't be done to it while its still in the computer. No one will ever examine data of any sort except that provided by the computer. And consider human nature. The people running the TV experiment won't doubt their own machine, expecially when its putting out exactly what they'd most hoped to see. No, Kim, I think we're safe."

"But its criminal, deliberately falsifying data that way."

"In a moral sense, you're right of course, and that point bothered me more than any other. Its against every principle I was taught and believe, but I think in this one case the advancement of science requires the violation of its principles."

" 'Violation' is right," Kim said.

"Doc, just how badly do you want to go to Mars," I asked.

He looked surprised and a little angry. "Your perception amazes me, Hank, but if you're implying that I'm advocating this merely because I want to go to Mars, you're absolutely wrong. Even if I knew right now that the only effect would be to cause the launching of more Marsmen, I'd still want to follow this course."

"But you still haven't answered my question."

"How badly do I want to go to Mars?" He looked embarassed and turned to stare out the window again. "More than anything at all."

"Then I think we should do it."

"Me too," Jesse echoed.

It took us three more days, working in shifts, to convince Kim to help us. He put up moral arguments, ethical arguments, technical arguments, and practical arguments, but in the end, he yielded.

And he did a beautiful job. It was 6 a.m. here, but a little before noon ("Don't want to have to worry about shadows.") in Solis Lacus on the sixth day after Marsman landed. A light sandstorm ("Or tracks.") had come up earlier in the morning, and the duty engineer on Earth was alternately yawning and staring at the TV screen trying to decide whether to tell Marsman to go into resting mode until it passed. The screen showed the boulder field Marsman's dog brain was guiding it thru. Suddenly out from behind one of the boulders churned Myrtle, all eight legs paddling sand for all they were worth, apparently flushed by Marsman. It almost immediately disappeared behind another boulder, and was seen no more.

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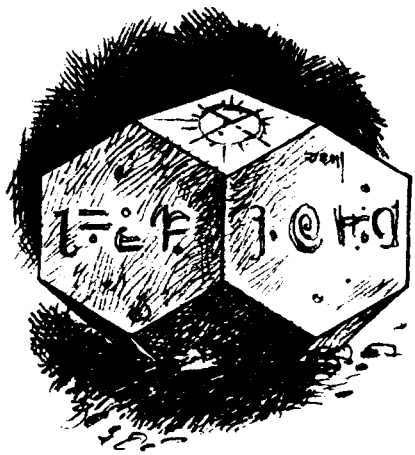
Marsman hadn't been programmed to go chasing after things, even things as interesting as that (oh, vain regrets!), so he took no notice, and by the time his masters could get word to him to go back for another look no trace could be found. It was very convincing, and like I said, a beautiful job.

Unfortunately it wasn't enough. The papers the next day had 'Mars Turtle Found' in four-inch type, all right, and a fuzzy photo of Myrtle, but the next day it was half-inch type on page four, and the day after that, interviews with scientists on page nineteen, and within a week it was forgotten by the public. No manned mission, no more Marsmen, no more money.



Things were very gloomy around the lab after that. Thorsen tried to take it philosophically: "We just underestimated the public's capacity for apathy. We didn't capture their imaginations."

But four weeks later the Solis Lacus Plinth did. Jesse came tearing into the lab to get Kim and me, and we all ran down to Thorsen's office. The bulletin was playing over and over on all the networks. A three meter cube of quartz, half drifted over with sand, once deeply carved, now worn almost smooth by the ceaseless action of the wind and and sand over the weary eons. They'd moved Marsman up close, and you could see the sand and wind eddying around it, and the carving, very faint, but almost, almost intelligible. The hackles on the back of my neck rose. Even Thorsen was speechless.

Funds for more Marsmen were voted almost that night, and construction resumed on *Ares* and *Stalin* the following morning. So Thorsen got what he wanted after all. He's scheduled to land with the first group next month. They're planning to set down in Solis Lacus, where Marsman I finally conked out, near where the Plinth is supposed to be.

But I wonder . . . ★

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A STEP FARTHER OUT

JERRY POURNELLE, Ph.D.

THE VELIKOVSKY AFFAIR

FOR 25 YEARS the startling cosmological theories of Immanual Velikovsky have sparked debates that generate far more heat than light. Is he a misunderstood genius, persecuted by a Big Science Establishment unwilling to acknowledge the truth, or is he a crackpot trudging through the fever swamps of pseudoscience?

"If he's right, the rest of us are crazy," said Harvard astronomer Harlow Shapley. "He has fearlessly said that much of our conventional science is a bust and needs restructuring. Most of us have known this for a long time," says Fred Jueneman, science writer and Velikovsky supporter.

The Velikovsky Movement challenges not only astronomy and archeology, but the whole structure of science. It's not surprising that emotions run high, and discussions of Velikovsky tend to be debates in which each side scores points off the other. There's little serious examination of Velikovsky's theories and evidence.

It is easy to see how this happened. Big Science not only treated Velikovsky as a crackpot from the beginning, but violated its own canons of ethics and fair play in doing it. The whole sad story was told in the *American Behavioral Scientist* ten years ago, and is available in De Grazia's book, *The Velikovsky Affair* (New York: University Books, 1968).

The scientific community should be, and much of it is, ashamed of itself. Not only was Velikovsky's best seller—a trade book, not a textbook—hounded out of the MacMillan Company by massive attacks of academicians on

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MacMillan's textbooks, it was also pursued even after the book was transferred to Doubleday which has no textbook department.

"Reviews" of Velikovsky appeared in which the "scientist" reviewer proudly stated that he/she had not read Velikovsky and never would. Cecilia Payne-Gaposhkin, a colleague of Shapley's, published a paper which misquoted Velikovsky and demolished the misinformation in the misquotes. It would be easy to fill this column with horror stories; for my purposes it's sufficient to show that Big Science has something to be ashamed of.

If Velikovsky is just another crackpot, those involved can claim that although the tactics were wrong, no real harm was done. However—if he has a core of truth in his publications! If he should have been taken seriously! Then indeed is there grounds for massive guilt feelings. To avoid guilt, refutation of Velikovsky is not enough. It must be shown that he was never worthy of serious attention.

I think this is why many scientists are not merely academic opponents, but actual enemies of this Russian-born psychiatrist. It explains why an entire day session of the AAAS could be devoted, not to looking at Velikovsky's theories for their merit, but rather to taking various statements of his and picking them apart. It may be why there was so much gleeful sarcasm expended on refuting casual remarks in no way central to Velikovsky's hypotheses.

Unfortunately for Velikovsky and his supporters, it is easy to score points off him. Some of his claims are so absurd that his most ardent supporters don't want to discuss them. Moreover, Velikovsky is guilty of both academic showmanship and sloppy scholarship. He can't help making spectacular claims that are totally irrelevent to his theories. He often quotes out of context. He does not evaluate his sources, and he seldom discusses evidence against his theories.

I'm sure this last paragraph will infuriate the Velikovskians as thoroughly as the opening paragraphs have inflamed his enemies. It would be unfair simply to make my charges and not give instances, but for continuity I will postpone examination of Velikovsky's rather strange scholarly tactics and procede immediately to my main thesis.*

I think both sides have lost sight of the major point of the debate. In my judgment, Velikovsky

*In the interests of fairness, and with Jerry's concurrence, I hereby invite Dr. Velikovsky (at standard *Galaxy* rates and a maximum length of 7,000 words) to address himself to any or all of the issues raised in Dr. Pournelle's column.

—BAEN

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has raised important questions that the Science Establishment should deal with. At the same time, his tactics and those of his followers make it difficult to have the impartial discussion he and they claim to want so badly.

MOST DISCUSSIONS OF VELIKOVSKY begin with a summary of his theories, invariably stating that his thesis is that sometime prior to 1500 BC the planet Venus, previously unknown in the solar system, erupted as a "comet" from Jupiter; that Venus narrowly missed striking Earth about -1500, and again 52 years later; and that some time after that Earth had one or more near encounters with Mars.

Although Velikovsky does say all this, it is *not* his basic thesis. Actually, Velikovsky's theories begin with his evidence for cataclysms in the immediate prehistorical times of Western, and world, civilization. His entire cosmology rests on the catastrophe hypothesis, and most of his evidence is mythological, legendary, and archeological. If it can be shown that there were widespread catastrophies in the period 2000 BC to 700 BC, then Velikovsky deserves well of the scholarly world, no matter what the fate of his cosmological theories.

After all, his cosmic billiards game is no more than his suggested mechanism whereby such catastrophies might have taken place. He is convinced that no other mechanism could account for what he believes were key events in man's history. Whether he is right or wrong about the cosmological mechanism, the catastrophies are his primary hypothesis, and the evidence for them is his primary data.

It is this evidence which the scholarly community ought to examine with care. If there were no catastrophies, his cosmology is simply irrelevent. If there were, it is up to those who reject his cosmology to come up with alternate explanations for these events; and Velikovsky will deserve the credit for bringing our pre-history to light.

Therefore, I propose to take Velikovsky seriously and examine his evidence for catastrophies. I also intend to raise several well-known facts that Velikovsky has ignored in his account of the life and times of the Bronze Age.

VELIKOVSKY states that much of his cosmic thesis comes from the Bible, and close reading of his books shows that he believes that the Bible is a real account of real history. For example, he points out that the Bible frequently refers to the Amalekites as very important people, yet history knows them only as desert robbers.

He is in good company in pointing this out: the Hittite Em-

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pire was discovered partly from the Biblical references to Hittites as a great Empire; for a hundred years archeologists thought of the Hittites as unimportant. Could the Biblical references be a key to unknown events in Near East pre-history?

In order to bring the Bible into correspondence with Egyptian history, though, Velikovsky has had to compile an entirely new Bronze Age Chronology. In doing so he once again places himself in a position in which if he's right, the other experts are crazy.

In defense of his chronology, Velikovsky has written a persuasive essay attacking the basis for traditional chronologies. He points out that most archeologists, not being chronologists, simply accept the "standard" chronology of Egypt and key their data to that; but the Egyptologists' chronology rests on far shakier data than its proponents believe. So far so good: and I for one wish I could find a good undergraduate level text on chronology, because my research has turned up only rather obscure articles that don't convince me.

However, to say that the traditional chronologies rest on less data than is generally supposed, and that there are nightmarish contradictions involved in accepting them, is not to say that Velikovsky's own scheme is correct. Velikovsky has not made minor adjustments in Egyptian chronology: he has thrown out about 500 years of what Egyptologists think of as history.

Because of this it is difficult to deal fairly with Velikovsky. One cannot simply show that there was no world-wide catastrophe at some date that Velikovsky says there was one, because he does not accept the usual dating scheme. His cosmology and his chronology fit together like a fine watch must be dealt with as one.

Furthermore, his books suffer from his style. He is often obscure, generally interprets everything in the most sensational light possible, and sometimes is internally inconsistent; financially his methods have served him well but as a scholar he is his own worst enemy.

It's hard to take him seriously. One has a strong temptation to throw his book across the room because it is so easy to pick out some outrageous statement and refute it out of hand. One must continually try to decide just how crucial a particular enormity is to his theories.

One must also ignore his infuriating habit of documenting the well-known while providing either no reference at all, or an unreliable source, for some of his most startling assertions. Finally, Velikovsky never mentions some quite well-known facts that seem to contradict his theories. I'll give

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examples of this later.

For all that, though, let's look at the evidence for catastrophe in the Bronze Age.

VELIKOVSKY BEGINS well; in his first two controversies I agree with his position. First, he attempts to supplement archeological finds with myth and legend. Therein lies a sad story: archeologists and historians seldom work together. There is a powerful archeological school that condemns any attempt to blend the testimony of the spade with legend and myth, and reputations of highly esteemed archeologists have suffered when they tried to link their potsherds to legend.

In my judgment this is a shame, and if Velikovsky can get historians and archeologists to talk to each other—even if only to refute him—he will have done both a favor.

Velikovsky also relies on the Bible, and is immediately embroiled in a curiously vicious scholarly war. Historians who are perfectly willing to build whole generations of XVth Century BC history on "Manetho" will reject the Bible on the grounds that it was written much later than the events it describes by priests who wanted to prove certain points. Yet Manetho was a 3rd Century BC priest who wanted to please his Greek masters, a sort of Egyptian Geoffrey of Monmouth—and his works have not even survived. What we know of Manetho comes from those who quoted him much later. Could it be that scholars, having once been unable to publish anything contradictory to the Bible, now have a tendency, in reaction, to reject everything it says?

But Velikovsky takes the Bible as history, and his view seems to gain strength as new archeological finds are made; and of course he is not alone in presuming that myth and legend contain a central core of historical truth.

I first became interested in Velikovsky because of his assertion that Plato had "one too many zeros" in his dating of the Atlantis legend. Plato says that Atlantis fell 9000 years before his own era. Velikovsky makes that 900.

Martin Gardiner in his *Fads and Fallacies in the Name of Science* ridicules Velikovsky for dropping the zero, and years later Isaac Asimov's "Minds in Confusion" echoed Gardiner with no better evidence. Yet it is very likely that Velikovsky was correct here; certainly his view has support from well-regarded scholars.

In 1939, Spyridon Marinatos, then Ephor of the Cyclades, theorized that Minoan civilization may have been destroyed by a cataclysmic eruption of Thera, a volcanic island 60 miles south of Cnossus. That eruption can be

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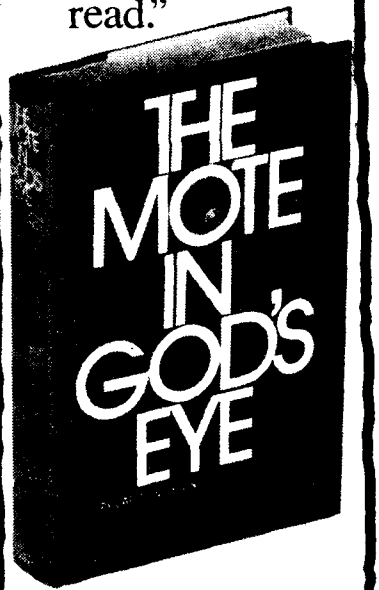
dated by archeology, radiocarbon technique, and vulcanology to about 1450 BC or perhaps a few years earlier—ie, 900 years before Plato.

The eruption was singularly violent, from four to ten times as powerful as Krakatoa. It was the most powerful explosion in known human history, with a force of more than 70 megatons.

The identification of Atlantis and Minoan Crete had been argued by reputable scholars from 1910 on, and in 1950 Marinatos explicitly discusses Crete's fall as the basis of the Atlantis Legend. This proved to be a mistake: not the identification, which has come to be widely accepted, but discussing it Marinatos has suffered from the charge of "sensationalism" ever since. I spent a day with him last summer and although he was charming and helpful, he simply will not discuss Atlantis at all. In 1950, however, he did.

Velikovsky must be familiar with Marinatos' work, and I am aghast when Velikovsky's supporters in *Pensee* claim that their idol "introduced" the dating of Atlantis to 900 rather than 9000 years before Plato. However, he certainly can rightly claim to have been among the first to recognize the importance of the Thera disaster and it was his handling of mythological data which led him to give it the correct date.

Robert Heinlein says this is: "Possibly the finest science fiction novel I have ever read."



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He can likewise claim to be among the first to accept the now widely held view that if there is an historical basis for the Atlantis legend, the fall of Minoan Crete in about -1450 was the event that inspired it. It should be noted that the conditional is widely accepted, but many archeologists doubt there was any historical basis for the Atlantis Legend at all. I'll add my view: Atlantis was real and Crete was it.

Now Velikovsky claims to be able to show that the Thera disaster was only the Mediterranean aspect of a global catastrophe. He *must* claim that: the Thera catastrophe is well documented and forms the major part of his evidence for disasters having taken place at that time.

He marshals an impressive amount of evidence for universal destruction at the time of the Thera eruption. He not only quotes myth and legend from China and Central America, but eminent French archeologists working in Mesopotamia. Unfortunately, I am not competent to evaluate his claims—and I cannot simply take them on faith because of his "scholarship."

Velikovsky nowhere discusses the evidence *against* his view of Thera. There's an impressive amount of it, but as far as all of his works are concerned it might as well not exist. He has to be familiar with the evidence; he quotes from the same documents that contain it. But he ignores it completely, and in fact at the AAAS meeting in San Francisco last spring, asserted that he does not have to change a single sentence of any of his books—even after 25 years.

In the rest of this column I will show why I for one use Velikovsky's books as an interesting compendium of legends, but do not consider them serious scholarship. I intend to bring up archeological facts that Velikovsky must be aware of, but which he has never mentioned, and which I believe establish that the Thera eruption, although locally devastating, was *not* a world-wide catastrophe.

By Velikovsky's own admission, if the 1500 BC events were not a universal catastrophe, he has no case. It is inconceivable that Venus narrowly missed Earth and yet did not affect the entire Mediterranean basin, if not the whole world. The day the sun stood still must have been devastating for everyone. If it was only catastrophe for those near Thera, there can be no case for the near miss by Venus.

FIRST. Velikovsky's revised chronology is not peripheral to his cosmology. He has revised the whole of Bronze Age chronology because he must. In particular, he must place the XVIII Dynasty

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of Egypt well into the First Millenium BC, and not at 1450 BC where everyone else puts it.

The reason for this is that we have very good records of the XVIII Dynasty. It was the most glorious period of ancient Egypt. It begins with Ahmose, who expelled the Hyksos (even Velikovsky admits that, and the order of pharoahs in the Dynasty; what he disputes is *when* they lived.) It includes Thuthmose I, Queen Hatshepsut of the Punt Expedition, Thuthmose III the Great, and continues into decline with Ahkhenaton the monotheist heretic. The XVIII is a nearly unbroken record of achievement, and there is little room for disasters within it.

Now if the Thera disaster took place in XVIII Dynasty, it had to be local, not universal. There are a few serious scholars who think the Thera explosion might have affected part of the Egyptian Delta, bringing darkness at noon, lightning, rains of red dust to produce rivers of blood, etc., and thus form the background for the Exodus; but no one contends that it was more than a local event in one province, and the "pharoah" referred to in the Bible must have been a local official.

Actually, most archeologists and Egyptologists think even this much is poppycock, and I must admit that although I would like to believe it for dramatic purposes, it is unlikely. How could the Exodus take place during Egypt's period of expansionistic glory? For precisely this reason Velikovsky has redated the XVIII Dynasty to about 900 BC, contemporary with David and Solomon.

Anyone who has visited the National Museum at Athens, and the dig at Cnossus in Crete, and the Minoan museum at Iraklion—and I have only recently returned from there—must be convinced that the Thera eruption took place in the period called Late Minoan I. The date of LM I may be in doubt, but not that the city Marinatos is excavating at Akrotira on the island of Thera was an LM I culture.

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Now in the tomb of Rekhmire, an Egyptian Vizier and Foreign Minister, there are paintings of Cretans carrying tribute offerings—and those offerings are from the LM I period. They are typical: a bull-head rhyton, and a collared rhyton—both easily recognizable as uniquely LM I.

Rekhmire was definitely an XVIII Dynasty official, so that whatever the date of XVIII Dynasty, it *must* correspond to LM I period on Crete. Even Velikovsky admits this.

And there we have the contradiction; if the Thera eruption was in LM I it must have been in 900 BC by Velikovsky's chronology, and thus cannot serve as evidence for his -1450 disaster. But of course we can establish that the Thera eruption was in -1450, and in fact it was Velikovsky's recognition of this at a time when most archeologists underestimated its importance that first attracted me to Velikovsky's work. The date of the eruption is established by stratigraphy, radio-carbon, and vulcanology, and is not seriously in doubt.

The only one who disputes the date is Pomerance of the Archeological Institute of America, and Dr. Pomerance wants it in 1200 to account for the so-called Dark Ages of Greece. Even if he were right it would be no use to Velikovsky, who must place LM I in -900; and besides, Velikovsky doesn't believe in the Dark Ages to begin with. And Pomerance is absolutely alone in his dating. Everyone else agrees that the eruption was no later than 1400 BC.

Second. Velikovsky quotes Manetho extensively in his books, and although he argues strongly against some parts of his history, he is not ashamed to use Manetho as an authority when he is needed. Velikovsky also uses the Greek legend of the Deucalion Flood as evidence for a catastrophe, and he very definitely dates the Deucalion Flood at about 1450 BC.

Manetho quite clearly states that the Deucalion Flood took place in the XVIII Dynasty, but you won't learn that from Velikovsky.

Next. In *Earth in Upheaval* Velikovsky reprints a speech made in October 1953. In that speech he claimed that Linear B, a language of the time of LM I, would prove to be Greek. There is then a long footnote in the book pointing out that in November 1953, a month after Velikovsky's prediction, Michael Ventris first announced his decipherment of Linear B, and lo and behold it was Greek.

This claim to a correct "prediction" is false. In 1951 Ventris sent copies of his decipherment to leading archeologists. By 1952 his claim was the talk of the profes-

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sion. In summer, 1952, there was a key find, a tablet decipherable using Ventris' system, but which Ventris had never seen. This confirmed Ventris' theory, and by January of 1953 virtually everyone in archeology believed Linear B "would prove to be Greek." A few diehards held out for ten more years, but they were a small minority.

So, of course by October 1953 there was no great expertise involved in identifying Linear B. Velikovsky discusses Linear B in books published before 1952, but in none of them does he even hazard a guess that it is Greek; it was not until the answer was known that he "predicted" it.

Unfortunately those Linear B tablets give him real problems. Velikovsky must place Linear B in about -700, because the largest find was in the Palace of Nestor at Pylos, and Velikovsky has the Trojan War in about 700 BC rather than -1250 when everyone else thinks it took place. (The traditional date is -1194, and it is still accepted by some authorities.) Also, Linear B is contemporary with the LM I pottery on Crete, although it survived on the mainland until much later.

But Linear B is contemporary with the Thera disaster which Velikovsky himself dates to -1500. There are several new finds that definitely make Linear B slightly predate the Thera eruption, so if Velikovsky's chronology is right, his disaster date is wrong, and his position is endangered; and vice-versa.

Next, Velikovsky must prove the Thera eruption to be a universal disaster. It's the heart of his position. But the eruption took place in LM I, and LM I is found in Mycenaean cities on the mainland, so that Minoan and Mycenaean civilizations can be synchronized. Mycenae experienced rapid *growth* of power and wealth following the end of LM I. This is precisely what one would expect if a local catastrophe removed the Minoans from the Aegean so that the Mycenaeans could inherit their trading empire. It is *not* what one would expect to follow universal catastrophe.

Needless to say, you will find none of these facts in Velikovsky's books or his more recent publications in *Pensee*.

In other words, both Velikovsky and his critics have suppressed evidence and indulged in other academic mau-mau tactics. Neither has played fair with the disinterested student. Now I wish I could simply dismiss Velikovsky as dead wrong at the heart of his theory and get on with *my* book on Atlantis.

(Well, of course; why else would I know so much about the Bronze Age Aegean? And remember, you saw the identification of Thera with

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Atlantis in this column when Willy Ley was writing it.)

UNFORTUNATELY, I can't simply dismiss Velikovsky, because there do remain maddening discrepancies in chronology, and some of them were predicted by Velikovsky. He has correctly predicted that radio-carbon dating would show that certain artifacts of both the XVIII Dynasty and Pre-Columbian Central America would prove to be younger than expected.

I don't have to accept cosmic billiards to use Velikovsky's eclectic studies of legend. I just have to be careful, because Velikovsky quotes Ginzberg's fairy tales of Jewish legend and Jane Harrison's excellent studies as if they were comparably reliable sources.

I do think there are some problems with chronology, although I doubt I need a cometary Venus to account for them. I do think some of the legends Velikovsky has painstakingly studied may embody real historical truths, possibly even of widespread cataclysms.

In fact, I have a wild guess —and it is no more than that —about a very large meteor strike in the Mediterranean around 1200 BC giving rise to the Phaeton legend. It might account for the very sudden decline of populations and culture, the loss of writing, and general discontinuities not only in Greece, but around the Mediterranean basin. But that's another story for another time and place, and if you want me to tell it here, write the Editor and ask for it. [*By all means! Ed.*] Archeology is not really a "natural" subject for this column, and I only went into it this month in order to try to play fair with Velikovsky.

I'm willing to learn from anyone, and I think there may well have been hitherto-unsuspected natural disasters in the late Bronze Age. For that reason I wish mightily that someone better qualified than I would read Velikovsky's books with an open mind and determine just how much real evidence he has in among all the other stuff he references. I don't mean just his legends, either, but the physical anomalies he describes in *Earth in Upheaval.*

On the other hand, having experienced what Velikovsky does to the evidence in a period in which I have some knowledge, I can understand why professional archeologists don't want to take him seriously. It isn't just that he challenges their "orthodoxy", but that he is either ignorant of basic facts, which in view of his widespread reading is hard to believe; or that he ignores them, inviting others to do the same to him. * *

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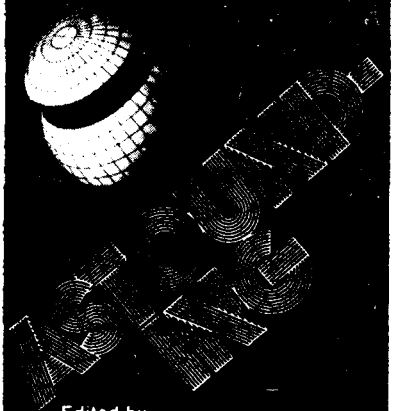

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THE LINGUIST

TAK HALLUS

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I

"*I won't have my brain picked,*" shouted Everly, squinting over the rear sight of the 30-30 and aligning the bead on the rocks below. "*Not this time! Not again!*"

A faint shadow dodged from rock to rock. Eberly squeezed the trigger. The rifle bucked against his shoulder. Dirt puffed in front of the rocks. The shot had fallen short.

"*Eberly, give up,*" came Plagio's voice, amplified by a bullhorn. "*You haven't got a chance. You can't fight us. There are too many of us.*"

"*Where there's life,*" responded Eberly, wishing he had something pithier and more original to say, "*there's hope.*" He squeezed off another round. Rock shattered. A man screamed.

"*You made a contract, Eberly.*"

"*An illegal contract.*"

"*But an enforceable contract, Eberly.*"

Bullets splattered on the rocks around Eberly, punctuating Plagio's comment about the contract's enforceability. Specific Performance? Was that what they called making someone fulfill his contract? Eberly shrugged. Maybe they called it Specific Performance. Maybe they called it Fred. Eberly had studied law once, but that, too, was gone, plucked from his head for a fee.

He dusted the rock chips from his sleeve and decided to change position. Plagio and his men were too close. Soon they would know his exact position. Knowing it, they could surround him and wait. Even if the Mohave sun failed to cook him, hunger and thirst would eventually defeat him; if he lost consciousness even for a minute Plagio would sweep down on him, sedate him, carry him off and pick his brain.

Eberly shoved two replacement shells into the 30-30. He stuck a bookmark into the tattered copy of Don Quixote and stuffed it into his coat pocket with the box of shells. This time, he would finish the book. If he had to shoot Plagio himself, he would follow Don Quixote to the end.

Quietly, keeping low behind the rocks, Eberly scurried toward the ledge he had spotted earlier. He slung the rifle across his back, but hesitated before continuing the climb, glancing down. Over the ledge, the cliff fell away for two hundred meters to the desert. One slip would leave him flattened on the sand or draped over a cactus, a sack of broken bones. Yet, death with honor —even without honor—had advantages. It would cheat Plagio of his pound of engrams. Momentarily, Eberly considered jumping, then rejected the idea. Any satisfaction he might feel at cheating Plagio would only be transitory.

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Better to climb higher and hope for total victory.

He began a sideways shuffle along the ledge, fingertips straining in fissures to hold his body against the rock wall. Once, he glanced down. His head swirled. He looked away, stopping and leaning his sweating forehead against the cool rock. He tried to breathe deeply to calm his nerves.

"Eberly!"

"Not now," muttered Eberly. "Don't distract me."

"We see you moving, Eberly. We have heat scanners on you."

Eberly inched toward the next outcropping, trying to ignore the distracting voice.

"Submit, Eberly. You've done it before. It takes only a few seconds. It is painless. Think of your wife and children. If you submit, they will continue to live in luxury. If you are killed they will have to go on welfare. Your wife is too slow-witted to be of use to us."

Now Plagio was insulting Gloria. True, Gloria was a slow learner. It had taken her four years just to master the fundamentals of Rumanian grammer, a skill Eberly sold Plagio for fifty dollars flat fee. Considering Gloria's faulty preterit and weak future subjunctive, along with her complete inability to understand the Rumanian relative pronoun, it was probably a good price. Still, Plagio had no reason to insult her.

"Your own wife pronounced French like a Bulgarian," shouted Eberly.

An angry burst of rifle fire answered.

EBERLY REACHED the outcropping and relative safety. To the west, the sun, an elongated orange ball on the desert horizon, was setting. No one would try to cross the ledge at night. If he could hold them off until after dark, he could finish the last two hundred pages of Don Quixote.

Eberly unslung the rifle and positioned himself behind a tall rock with a V-shaped notch in the top, resting the gun barrel in the notch. At this distance, he would need all the stability he could find to keep Plagio pinned down. Below, he heard gravel slip. He fired twice.

"No," he muttered. "Save the ammunition. Only shoot when I see something worth shooting."

He got out the box of shells and opened it, replacing the two spent rounds and counting the rest in the fading light. Thirty rounds, including those in the rifle. Hardly enough for a war but adequate to hold off Plagio.

"Eberly!"

"Brain picker!" shouted Eberly. *"Filthy brain picker!"*

"I harvest a crop. Nothing more. We have had a profitable arrangement in the past, Eberly. Why can't it continue?"

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"Why can't I finish Don Quixote?"

"I am a reasonable man. How—"

"You are a pig and a brain picker!"

"As I was saying, I am a reasonable man, a businessman. How much do you have to go to finish it?"

"About two hundred pages."

A pause ensued. *"How long will it take you?"*

"In this light? All night. Maybe longer."

"How long with a good reading lamp?"

"Four or five hours."

"It's too long. The customer is waiting. He has a final exam in Spanish tomorrow at eleven a.m. He's paid in advance. We have to set up the equipment, make the extraction and the implant, then get him back to Los Angeles for the exam. Submit, Eberly. You can finish the book next time."

Next time. Eberly had already learned Spanish seven times. Each time, when he mastered the ability sufficiently to read Don Quixote, Plagio, who used Don Quixote as the objective test of Spanish mastery, extracted the skill from him, leaving Don Quixote or Sancho Panza or the beautiful Dulcinea or the not so beautiful Rosinante in some dire situation and Eberly unable to find out what happened. He was thankful, at least, that he could remember the plot. Plagio only took the language skill, not the information it conveyed.

"Plagio!" yelled Eberly.

"What?"

"You said the same thing last time and the time before that. It's no go. You'll never let me finish. Next time will be exactly like this time. As soon as I can read it, you'll pick my brain. I won't even know how to say buenos días."

"Read it in translation."

Infuriated by Plagio's aesthetic insensitivity, Eberly muttered, *"Carumba,"* and squeezed off three rounds. His ears rang from the explosions.

"Eberly, what was that for?"

"Because it's never the same in translation, you philistine!"

Eberly sat down behind the rocks, planning to take advantage of the last rays of sunlight. He opened Don Quixote and began looking for his place.

"Let's see, they came to the inn and Don Quixote fell asleep and—ah, here it is. The curate has just said the original cause of Don Quixote's madness was from reading books."

Eberly became immersed in his book. Eventually, the light faded completely. He withdrew a penlight from his shirt pocket, but instead of flicking it on to read, he leaned back against the rocks. His escape from Plagio's Palm Springs home had unexpectedly drained him. He had planned to escape, then make his way to the main

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highway and thumb a ride to Los Angeles. Somehow—probably from crashing through the window, an act he found considerably more unnerving and more difficult than in the movies (It had taken two trys and the help of the rifle butt to get through the plate glass)—his sense of direction had become addled. Instead of striking out toward the highway, he had struck out across the desert. He had expected Plagio to follow immediately. Evidently, Plagio's henchman, Marvin The Extractor, a name referring to Marvin's performing illicit engramectomies, had remained unconscious longer than expected. The glancing blow with the Ming vase, shattering the vase, had felt too light to put Marvin out long, but after an hour of walking, Eberly had looked back and seen no sign of pursuit. Only when he neared the rocks three hours later and started his climb to reconnoiter and get his bearings did he see the jeep, bouncing toward him across the desert.

"Eberly."

Eberly noticed how the voice carried in the night air, making Plagio seem to be right on top of him. *"What?"*

"Can we make a deal?"

"What kind of deal?"

"You submit and—"

"Never!"

"You submit and I'll give you three weeks paid vacation in Acapulco before you start on your next subject."

"What good will Acapulco be if I don't know Spanish?"

"You don't have to talk to anyone."

"I like *talking to people."*

"O.K., make it Miami—anywhere."

EBERLY THOUGHT about it. Plagio must be desperate. He had never offered Eberly a vacation before. He always expected Eberly to be back at the books the day after an extraction. The client must be someone big, or the son of someone big, possibly one of Plagio's superiors. In spite of the dominating figure Plagio had become in Eberly's life, Eberly knew Plagio was small fry to the Organization, that vague and only obliquely-mentioned group who financed Plagio. When Congress outlawed engram transplants in the early 1990's, claiming it allowed the rich to become not only richer but smarter, organized crime moved in. The price to college students, harried executives without time to take night classes, or any of the myriad other slow-learners in society had actually dropped when people like Plagio took over. The American Medical Association had maintained the cost of the operation at such artificially high levels—they fought the criminalization of engram extraction tooth and nail, but popu-

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lar sentiment and the proximity of a congressional election carried the day—that even the illegality of the procedure failed to sustain the high price. Nowadays, a college student with five thousand dollars and a disinclination to study—by the looks of Plagio's balance sheet, something close to eighty percent of the students in the country engaged in "cramming" as it was colloquially called—could buy French, German, Spanish or any western language at a level sufficient to sustain them through graduate study. Slavic, Oriental and African languages, along with ancient languages, came slightly higher. Other subjects varied according to the job market. One year sciences would be expensive, the next, law or medicine. Liberal Arts seldom became economically interesting enough to transplant, except foreign languages, Eberly's specialty. Group rates were also available, allowing students to pass around skills as needed. Plagio preferred to sell to groups, fraternities and sororities. Though the fee per person was smaller, the total was larger and the overhead—supporting people like Eberly, who had a gift for language learning (He had once learned Kurdish in seven weeks.) remained constant.

Still, if Plagio were so anxious to deliver, the customer must be important. Did that fact give Eberly some bargaining power? Maybe.

"Plagio."

"What?"

"Who's the customer?"

"What's it to you?"

"I've got a deal of my own to offer."

"Let's have it."

"You let me finish this book and I'll submit. Tell the customer to call in sick."

"He tried that already. His teacher doesn't give makeup exams. If he doesn't take the exam, he flunks. If he flunks, he's out of school—he's a borderline case already. If he's out of school, you know what that means."

"One less future customer for you."

"Right."

"Is that all you think about, Plagio, money?"

"It makes the world go round, Eberly."

"There's more to life than money."

"What?"

At a loss, Eberly hedged. *"Why can't you be reasonable?"*

"I think I am being reasonable. You're the one that's fighting the system and being unreasonable. What can you gain? A Pyrrhic victory?"

"A what?"

"Are you forgetting your English?"

Eberly shook his head. Pyrrhic? It was Greek to him. He shrug-

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ged and sat down, flicking on the penlight. Plagio would never understand. Things other than money drove some men, things with intrinsic merit, things without market value. He began to read. The dot of light danced across the page, illuminating accent marks and tildes. He read on. Don Quixote, once more mounted and questing, galloped, or rather, considering the nature of the sway-backed Rosinante, plodded through Eberly's brain. If only, mused Eberly, he had some modern equivalent to Rosinante, some charger, sound of limb and ready for flight, some jennet or jade or—

"Jeep," said Eberly.

He stood up and peered around the rocks. No sign of Plagio. Vaguely outlined below him, visible in the starlight only as a rectangular lump on the sand, stood the jeep.

"But how?" wondered Eberly aloud.

If he retraced his steps, crossing the rock ledge, Plagio would see him. Plagio's heat scanner worked even better at night. Searching the rocks for an alternate exit, he found the only possibility, a sheer descent to the desert floor. Looking at the drop he felt himself sway. It would be difficult during the day. At night, it would be impossible. He decided to wait for dawn, and then descend and try for the jeep.

DAWN, TENTATIVE, gradual, then more assertive, arrived just as the battery in Eberly's penlight gave out, sending its faint emanations over the desert horizon. Though he had only ten pages to go to finish Don Quixote, he decided to postpone the pleasure. Dawn would rouse Plagio, too. If Plagio arrived before the end of the book—Eberly broke off, unwilling to let the thought appear in his mind.

He stuffed his belongings into his jacket, checked the rifle and prepared for the descent. If he were lucky, he would make it to the jeep and freedom before Plagio noticed.

"Eberly."

Should he answer? If he failed to answer, Plagio would boldly climb the rocks to inspect, thinking Eberly had escaped in the night. He wanted Plagio pinned in the rocks as long as possible.

"What is it now, mind raper!"

"Eberly, do you have to use insulting language like that? I have always treated you fairly."

"Like a prize Hereford, ready for milking."

"A Hereford's a steer."

"Call it what you will, brain picker! You understand what I mean."

"No, I don't, Eberly. I don't understand you at all. I thought I did, once. I thought you were like the rest of us. I thought you knew what was important in life."

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"Money."

"That's right. What you can't sell in the market place isn't worth having."

"It's a form of intellectual prostitution, Plagio."

"Prostitution's a marketable skill, Eberly. If you think Gloria's game, I'm sure I can find a spot for—"

"INTELLECTUAL prostitution, I said."

"Oh, Sorry. It's hard to hear in these rocks."

"You drain people's minds for profit, Plagio."

"As I said, I harvest a crop. The crop is in demand. It's the way of the world, Eberly. Submit to it."

"Submit," muttered Eberly, jacking a shell into the chamber of the 30-30, about to pop up over the top of a rock and get off a shot. He controlled himself. Plagio probably wanted him to show himself. Though Plagio would have instructed his men to shoot for the torso, thus saving the brain and its engrams, Eberly felt little comfort in the idea. Plagio could extract the engrams for up to two or three hours after death. No, he would remain hidden.

"Eberly."

"What?"

"When did you suddenly get morality?"

"What do you mean?"

"You've worked with me for the last ten years. You've never complained before."

"I never complained because I was hooked."

"Narcotics? They will interfere with your learning capacity, Eberly."

"Not narcotics–money!"

A sarcastic edge came into Plagio's amplified voice. *"But now you're not hooked."*

Eberly thought about Gloria, about the kids, Ephraim and Ezekiel, both born when he was studying Biblical Greek. The money, arriving every Friday like clock-work, never late, never short, had kept him going. Each time he wanted to do something for himself—branch out into business, or go back to school and learn something unsaleable (History or Literature)—money and the soft seduction of luxury, along with Glory's spendthrift nature, kept his nose in a grammer book, conjugating Estonian verbs. Ten years without once doing something for himself. Ten years without taking his eyes from the demands of the market place. Ten years without doing something for its intrinsic worth. It was ten years too long. Plagio might know what Hereford meant—a Hereford could be sold on the market—but he would never understand the meaning of intrinsic worth, a thing done for itself, a windmill tilted. No, Eberly was no longer hooked, at least for the

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moment, on money. He was hooked on something more compelling, something he had to do, if only once, for himself. Casting his eyes up to the last fading star in the west, Eberly, hand in his jacket pocket, held tightly to Don Quixote.

"It's time to try for the jeep."

THE DESCENT WAS steeper than Eberly anticipated. He tore his pantleg on the rocks, almost dropped the rifle once, and hung by his fingertips innumerable times, sweating and scrambling for a foothold. Eventually, hands torn and bleeding from the sharp rocks, he dropped the last three meters to the desert, narrowly missing a kangoroo rat, who looked at him—frozen except for its twitching nose—then fled.

"You're lucky," said Eberly to the vanished rat. "No Plagios in your life."

During his descent, the sun had climbed up the sky. It baked the desert and broiled Eberly. June was a less than accommodating month in the Mohave. Eberly wished he had a hat. He wiped his forehead on his sleeve, planning his next move. Approach the jeep by stealth or rush it? Should he try for the jeep at all? Plagio or one of his men might be close to it. They could put a bullet through him before he could drop the jeep into low. Perhaps he should exploit his small advantage and head into the desert. And the keys, what if they were in Plagio's pocket? Eberly glanced at the sun. He could almost hear it crackling. No, the desert was out. It had to be the jeep, the jeep or surrend—

"Never."

The keys. If the keys were missing, he could sabotage the jeep and try to escape on foot. Either way, it was his only chance.

Keeping low, he worked his way around the base of the rock pile. With luck, Plagio would be above him, looking up and shouting into his bullhorn.

"*Eberly.*"

Hypothesis proved. Plagio was still talking to him. Getting no answer, Plagio would be drawn farther up the rocks and farther away from the jeep.

"*Eberly, answer me.*"

Eberly chuckled, amused at fooling Plagio, then tensed, freezing behind a man-sized boulder. The scraping footsteps of a man descending in gravel had frozen him. Cautiously, he peered around the boulder, keeping low. The jeep stood on a sand dune about twenty meters from the rocks. Marvin The Extractor, his elongated head like a loaf of bread with hair, approached it. Horror-struck, Eberly watched as Marvin leaned across the driver's seat and plucked the keys from the ignition. Plagio was one step ahead of him.

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Throwing caution, and, inadvertently, his penlight, to the wind, Eberly—leaving his crouch behind the rocks like a Marine leaving a landing craft, rifle gripped at the small of the stock and the barrel, holding it almost horizontal before him, a fearsome, bared-tooth leer on his face—charged. Charging on sand proved a slow business. Still, he managed to surprise Marvin, noting, before Marvin turned, the white bandage on the back of Marvin's head where the vase had landed.

Marvin turned, saw Eberly sturggling up the dune, started to laugh—pointing his finger—as Eberly took a comic pratfall in the loose sand, changed his mind and went for his sidearm, a .45 in a flap holster. Marvin's attempted laugh fueled Eberly's rage. Eberly reached the top of the dune. Marvin had the holster flap up and the gun half-withdrawn. Eberly swung with the rifle butt, connecting with the side of Marvin's loaf-shaped head. Marvin, staring blankly, dazed, stood a moment after the blow, shook his head once, then wilted. His unconscious body began rolling down the dune like a log.

Rolling, Marvin's .45 went off.

"Damn it," muttered Eberly, frowning, "why don't you tell the whole world, Marvin."

The shot would bring Plagio. Eberly scrambled after the rolling man. Abruptly, Marvin stopped rolling, almost tripping Eberly. Eberly knelt and gave the prone figure a slight nudge. It flopped on its back, snorting sand and beginning to breathe again. Quickly, Eberly rifled the pockets, coming up with two sets of keys, one presumably for the jeep and the other for Marvin's car.

He shook Marvin.

"Wake up, you creep."

Marvin's eyes started to open, narrow slits in the sand-matted face. Eberly dangled both sets of keys before Marvin's eyes.

"Which of these fits the jeep?"

The eyes closed. The head lolled.

"Marvin, damn it, wake up." He slapped Marvin once. The blow succeeded only in pushing Marvin farther down the dune.

Sand kicked up near Marvin's head, followed almost immediately by the sound of rifle fire. Eberly looked up. Plagio and two men, half inch figures resting their rifles on rocks, fired at him.

Taking both sets of keys, he left Marvin and started up the dune. Sand hopped and jumped around his feet. He heard one stray round plink off the jeep. Only when he reached the relative safety of the opposite side of the jeep did he look back. Plagio, kneeling, and the two men, standing behind him and firing, had reached the base of the rock pile.

Eberly steadied the rifle across the hood of the jeep and fired

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four quick rounds. Though he could see none of them hit, Plagio, scurrying for the rocks, must have gotten the message.

Eberly reloaded and got into the jeep. Frantically, he tried the keys, innumerable keys on both chains. Why did Marvin carry so many keys? Vaguely, Eberly remembered a comment of Plagio's. Marvin, before setting up as an engram extractor, had stolen cars. It explained much of Marvin's character, the joy he took in his work. Stealing cars, stealing engrams, they both gave Marvin the same illicit thrill. A key fit.

Eberly stomped the clutch to the floor and twisted the key. The jeep ground, coughed and caught, coming alive. He jammed the gearshift into first and popped the clutch. The jeep lurched, almost seemed to hop, and then stopped, stalled.

Eberly restarted it, this time gently releasing the clutch. The engine uttered a decrescendo of slowing, labored, lugging noises, stalling.

Eberly checked the emergency brake—off—then leaned out to look at the front tire—flat. At the instant Eberly had popped the clutch, Plagio's aim had evidently proven true. It accounted for the hopping sensation.

"What now?" asked Eberly, staring at the flat tire.

A bullet shattered the windshield, leaving a hole surrounded by a spiderweb of cracked glass.

"Take cover," answered Eberly.

He got out of the jeep and crawled under it, positioning himself so Plagio would have to charge straight up the dune and into his rifle fire.

Furtively, Plagio attempted to dart from the rocks. Eberly fired. Sand spurted at Plagio's feet. The figure retreated, shaking its fist at Eberly. After several seconds, the bullhorn came on.

"Eberly."

Eberly cupped his hands around his mouth, answering. *"What?"*

"You can't escape now. You may have us pinned down but we've got you pinned down, too. And that jeep isn't going anywhere. It's a standoff, Eberly. Give up."

SUDDENLY, inexplicably, doubt surfaced in Eberly's mind. Plagio was right, a standoff. What could he hope to gain by resisting Plagio? Actually, the man wanted nothing more than his due, completion of the illegal contract. What was wrong with that? In return, Eberly would get not only his life, something he had always found useful, but life in luxury.

Conscious of his own mortality, conscious of the shortness of life, conscious also that he was outgunned, Eberly considered submitting. He had responsibilities,

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Gloria and the children. Selfishness, a quality he abhorred on principle though practiced from time to time, was no reason to deny his family the good life, was it? He imagined Gloria in the welfare line, dress in rags, hair frazzled, people crowding in front of her. He imagined Ephraim and Ezekiel, selling pencils, begging from strangers, their eyes tear-filled and pitiful. And why?

Eberly crawled out from under the jeep, disgusted with himself, preparing to surrender. He stood up and took the copy of Don Quixote from his pocket, glaring at it.

"Because of *you*," he snarled. "*That's* why!"

He hurled the book to the sand and began hopping on it with both feet.

"You! You! You! Traitor! Seducer! What the hell good are you anyway?"

He stopped hopping, stepping back from the book. It had fallen on its spine, open to the page with Eberly's bookmark. He looked at the half-buried book, breathing deeply and trying to control his fury, pondering.

A bullet whizzed past his ear, jerking him from his ponderings. He dropped to the sand, nose inches from the book. Plagio, unaware of Eberly's intent to surrender, was still firing.

"*Plagio*," shouted Eberly.

The firing ceased. "*What?*"

"*I want—*" The words seemed to stick in his throat.

"*You want what?*"

"*I want to—*" Eberly broke off, his attention attracted by the page in front of his nose. He began to read.

"*You want to what?*" coaxed Plagio.

"Just a minute."

"*Eberly?*"

"*Just a minute!*"

Eberly became lost in the knight's final return home. Sancho Panza's wife, Joan Panza, after asking about the health of Sancho's donkey (Better, answered the squire, than that of the master), inquired what profit the squire had gained from his adventures, what dresses for Mrs. Panza, what shoes for the children?

I bring none of these things, good wife, quoth Sancho, *although I bring other things of more moment and estimation.*

"More moment and estimation," mumbled Eberly, sniffing, a tear beginning its journey down his cheek. Doubt again surfaced in his mind, this time challenging his desire to surrender. His voice changed, hardening, determination encrusting every syllable.

"More moment and estimation."

He looked over the top of the book. Plagio was nowhere in sight.

"*Plagio!*"

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No answer. He looked down the sloping dune. Something odd, or rather, the lack of something odd—Marvin—attracted his attention. Had Marvin revived? Or—

Grasping the book in one hand and the rifle in the other, Eberly crawled under the jeep, elbows and knees dragging him forward. He reached the crest of the dune. Temorously, he looked over. The dune dipped in the area of Marvin's body, creating natural cover, obscuring Eberly's line of fire. He could see the tops of three heads behind the dip. While Eberly read, Plagio and his men had reached Marvin. They advanced out of the divot on their stomachs. Seeing him, they fired, rifles blazing in rapid succession. Sand hopped and skipped on all sides.

Repositioning the book slightly, Eberly rested the rifle barrel along the book's inner crease and aimed. He fired twice, halting Plagio's advance. He glanced down at the page next to the barrel, reading on.

Proceeding in this manner, firing and reading, pausing occasionally to turn a page or reload, Eberly impeded Plagio's advance and followed Don Quixote's. He read through the sonnets and epitaphs of the last few pages, eventually arriving at both the last paragraph and his last bullet.

A scholar, read Eberly, had been given the moldy, time-worn papers treating of the life and doings of *Don Quijote de la Mancha* and had, according to the author, (someone named Cervantes) deciphered them. They promised to tell of further exploits, a third sally for the great knight.

"A third sally," said Eberly, closing the book and firing the last round. Another tear formed in his eye as he wistfully imagined the third sally.

"Eberly."

The voice of reality. *"What?"*

"By my count, you're out of ammunition. We're coming up."

Eberly rolled on his back, throwing his arms out to either side and letting the sun warm his face. He spoke quietly. "Come and get me, vulture. I'm ready."

He could hear Plagio marching up the dune. What had Plagio scheduled him for next time? Ah, yes, Russian. For the fifth time, Russian. In that word, Eberly saw his future. Russian would be harder than Spanish. First of all, that funny alphabet, like barbed-wire he would have to penetrate to get at the language. Secondly, it would take more time and effort to plan carefully, plus more endurance to carry out the plan. Momentarily, he shuddered at the rigors that lay ahead. At the same time, he welcomed them. What else could a man do who was driven from within? What else could a man do who was only on page fifteen of *War and Peace?* ★

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Galaxy/IF Dialogue #4

I'M WARNING YOU, Miss. . .Ms.? Sorry. You're taking a terrible risk going in there. You don't know Alter-Ego the way I do. If he even suspects for an instant that you're a girl. . .woman. Sorry.

If you insist. Just do me a favor and keep in the shadows and if you don't mind hunching your shoulders forward. . . Sorry. It's just if he sees those big. . . Yes, he *is* a sexist. For your own protection, if you'd pull that man's shirt looser from your jeans. . . . And don't say a word! Not a sound.

Yeah, pull the bolts while I unlock those Yales. I know—got to bring the oilcan down one of these times. The screech gets worse each time they're pulled. Now, the chains. . . . Hold the lantern high as I pull this big mother open. . . . Sorry.

Watch the steps. The slime. . . Oh, that's from when I stepped on his pet spider. An obscene affection. . . . Never forgave me. Never cleaned up the mess, either. Sloppy.

Where is he? We don't dare go too far from the door. Those side passages. . . . "Alter? ALTER? Where are you?"

"I'm coming, Geis. You pick the worst times to visit. . .no damn privacy even in your own dungeon! Bad enough having to use a hole in the rock floor as a privy and having to keep it covered with a copy of I WILL FEAR NO EVIL—Who is that?"

"Ohh. . .just a fan. Nobody special. An observer."

"Why is he hunched over by that stack of mouldy fanzines? I'm not going to sell any of them, you! An 'observer'? What if I don't

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want to be observed, hah? You selling bi-monthly tickets, Geis? 'See the Freak'? 'Ten bucks for a visit to the dungeon to peek at the dreaded Alter-Ego'? That your gimmick? Hey, you, how much did he con you out of?"

"Alter, it's time for you to vent your spleen. You know how ill you get if it isn't vented every few months."

"I'll vent when I feel like it. Hey, you! I asked you a question! Get away from those copies of STAR ROCKETS!"

"Leave him alone, Alter. He doesn't want any of those ancient crudzines from your youth. Now about your emmission of bile—"

"I'll spurt my bile up your—Hey. . .is that a *girl*?"

"Girl? Don't be ridiculous. Now, I order you by my wearing of the Amulet and the Ring and the Scret Words: Yug Sluggoth Thunkis Fgn-thi-Ulgudd. . . ."

"Okay, okay, okay. Geez, my sinuses. . . Let's see now. Current trends in science fiction. . .there is the matter of 'literary values' beginning to pollute the precious bodily fluids of science fic— You sure that isn't a girl? I never saw a guy with bumps like. . . . Hmm. Sorry, fella. No insult intended. You oughta go on a diet, though."

"Alter, attend to the bile."

"Sorry, Geis. Bile. . . Yes. You have touched me where I live. I love to rant and rave against the organized conspiracy, the *plot* to destroy science fiction as we know it! The enemy is everywhere, insidiously scheming. . . . Well, you know I've been reading all my life and I make no bones about it. I've had it up to *here*—over my bloody head!—with what are called 'literary values'. They are an intellectual con-game, an elitist ego-trip. a—what's a good third phrase, Geis? Gotta balance my sentence."

"Uhhh. . ."

"Hopeless. You're—"

"All right, let's hear you define exactly 'literary values'. You hate them so much, you ought to know what you hate."

"C'mon, Geis, *you* know! Excessive, pretentious, obsessive characterization. Deep, Important Thoughts. Significance. No science fiction writer alive today can win a Hugo or a Nebula without a heap of Significance and Symbolism. Actually, Symbolism is even better—a good Christ-figure, a birth trauma, an Earth Mother. . . .a Succubus. . .the orgasmic Symbolism, for instance, of Bob Shaw's hero in his phallus spaceship thrusting, raping, the 'vagina' of Orbitsville and going deep into the dyson sphere 'womb'. . . .now that's Symbolism! Of course, a good critic can find a Symbol in ANY story or scene or. . . Writers always use symbols. . .it's unavoidable."

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"So how are these hated 'literary values' ruining science fiction? And let me say, Alter, that this all has a familiar ring to it. Can't you rant about something else?"

"Of course, and I will next time, Geis. I'm just reinforcing an engram. Hitting the nail on the head to drive it deeper. Repetition is the heart of propaganda, the soul of advertising, the karma of—"

"Get on with it."

"It comes down to. . .well, let me explain it this way. See, in porno writing—at which you are an expert, eh?—the sex imperative overpowers every other narrative consideration. The plot, characterization, locale, the whole schmeer is bent and twisted to serve the sex scenes, sex scenes, and more sex scenes. Right? So. What is happening in science fiction nowdays is that the genre is sliding gradually into the bed of the literary mainstream and getting seduced. . .seduced. . . . You *sure* that isn't a girl?"

"That is not a 'girl'. Seduced how? Make your point."

"Getting seduced—well, gradually the science fiction plots, the themes, the stereotypes, are being warped to serve mainstream ends. What price acceptance, eh, Geis? Too many science fiction writers nowdays are writing bastard science fiction, science fiction molded to the mainstream symbolism imperative, characterization imperative, significance imperative, relevance imperative. . .all clumped into a general 'literary values' imperative. See?"

"In a word, Alter, science fiction is being prostituted?"

"Yup. Just as you wrote RAW MEAT, THE SEX MACHINE, and THE ARENA WOMEN and prostituted science fiction to the porno imperative, so these latter-day (and some older-day) writers are prostituting science fiction in a MUCH more dignified way—so they think—to serve 'literary values' and reap the heavy fringe benefits of intellectual elitism and respectability.

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Science fiction should be fun and WOW and exciting and gripping and entertaining (and still is now and then because a few editors and a few writers still cling to the *reader* imperative), but more and more it is boring, serious, ego-trippy, Literary. . .serving a new set of masters. Hail and farewell."

"You exaggerate. You overstate. You oversimplify."

"Maybe. But when certain leading lights in the s-f scene lust for respectability and academic acceptance and start calling their work and our genre 'speculative fiction' and 'speculative fantasy', that's a signal I find difficult to ignore."

"Alter, you are a troglodyte, an arch reactionary with your head buried firmly in 1937. That was the year, I recall, that you read your first science fiction magazine—a tattered copy of ASTONISHING SUPER SCIENCE STORIES."

"Sure, sure, I know that old put-down: there's a ten-year-old in this 47-year-old mass of aches and pains who is yowling for the good old days. I'm hip that most of those pulp-days stories were God-Awful and I'd hold my nose if I read them today. But—"

"Alter, you are a common person! You want action, suspense, danger, life-and-death, gosh-wow, malevolent aliens, space wars. . .all that discredited raygun Flash Gordon & Buck Rogers jazz."

"DAMN RIGHT! *If* it's done realistically and with skill and talent. And you can keep the weak, palid, gutless, soul-searching, whining, mystical, considerate, socially conscious crap that's passing as science fiction today. Writers today are becoming afraid to be entertainers and 'commercial' in science fiction now. They'll be sneered at, they fear, and not approved for reading in S-F 101 at Academic State College. We have come to that."

"But, if this new type of science fiction is what the readers want. . . ."

"Oh, Geis! In the depression of the Thirties science fiction magazines sold more copies than they do now! Now IF is gone. AMAZING and FANTASTIC are down to 25-30,000 readers and may not last out the year. *This* magazine may be on the ragged edge. WHY?"

"Well, there's TV, poor distribution of magazines. . . ."

"Bullshit. If there were as many science fiction programs on TV as there are detective shows, I'd maybe agree. . .to a degree. But printed fiction has many advantages over TV fiction—if it's GOOD fiction. As for the poor distribution argument. . .if s-f mags sold out, if there was a *demand* for the mags, you better believe the distributors would deliver. Money imperative always commands. That's what the mar-

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ket is all about. the s-f mags are mostly suffering because the readers don't much like what they're printing. Too many people in the s-f field have forgotten why people buy fiction! *Fiction*, damn it, should aim for the guts, the groin, and the brain in that order. *Science* fiction has to add Wonder."

* * * * * *

Up yours Alter—*IF* was going up by (censored)% per issue, but the margin-of-profit per issue was going down almost as fast. Aside from which, raising the newsstand sales (censored)% only means, say, five extra copies to the average newsie. Or to put in in the words of the dealer on my corner: "Twice nothin is still nothin, Jack."

He sells *hundreds* of copies of *Reader's Digest* every month, Alter. If he doesn't get his shipment of sf-mags one month, so what does he care? Not much, Alter, not much. And *paper*, Alter—what about *paper!?* They wouldn't *give* us any, Alter. Oh, Alter, you (censored) seepage from Geis's subconscious, you've touched me to the quick. I do publish stories that are good to read—I do, I *do!*

—BAEN

* * * * * *

"God, you're a presumptuous know-it-all. How—"

"I'm not saying the mix shouldn't be varied in emphasis, but in the last ten years or so science fiction has gotten brain (intellect) heavy. . .self-consciously Arty. . .and the readership has shrunk and shrunk. . . Soon science fiction will be owned by the professors; written for the professors, and read by the professors—and their classes."

"There you go off the deep end again!"

"Watch it happen, Geis! Now—get the hell out of here and take that tempting morsel with you—not that you'd ever leave her. God! I—can't—control—myself—any—"

"Keep away from her, Alter! Miss. . .Ms. keep away from him! You're playing with dynam—"

"HAH!" **rip** "*Oooo, look at those—*"

"Stop it! Alter! By the Amulet, by the Ring, I command thee—*Yug Thunkis Fgm-thu. . . .thi Ulglud. . .*"

"*Ahhh. . .umm. . . .*"

shriek

pant-pant-pant

How disgusting. Still, I *did* warn her. . .and. . .it's not as if she isn't. . .in fact. . .hmm. . . . Well, I'll just read this tattered copy of THE EARLY ASIMOV until they're finished. Man, look at Alter go! It *had* been a long time for him.

Let's see now. . . 'Although I have written over a hundred twenty books, on almost every subject. . . .' *yawn*. Man, look at them go. ★

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WHAT HAS GONE BEFORE

I had been back in Amber for less than a week when my brother Caine was killed, killed in such a fashion as to make me the logical suspect. Only, I had arrived on the scene a trifle ahead of schedule. I got my hands on the real culprit and intended to question him. He was understandably displeased with this, and circumstances required that I kill him in order to deal properly with his displeasure. This left me more than displeased. It left me without an adequate defense. But there was something strangely familiar about the guy: He strongly resembled one of those creatures which had come in pursuit of Random, back when he had sought sanctuary at Flora's place in Westchester, years ago.

I buried Caine and bore his killer's remains to the palace. Random had never explained what had been going on back at that time. I realized I had better have the story fast, before I let the others know what had become of Caine.

When I got to him, Random told me that years before, when he had been living off in Shadow, he had received a cryptic message from our missing brother, Brand. Brand had indicated that he was a prisoner in a peculiar place: a burning, sunless land of revolving rocks and drifting dead. There he was held in an isolated tower, guarded by a transparent serpent and a squad of strange troops. Random had decided to go to his rescue.

Steering his sail plane through Shadow to that place, Random had mounted to the tower and fought with the serpent. He finally dispatched the creature, but was unable to effect Brand's release. Weaponless, battered and with a sprained ankle, he had been forced to flee aboard one of the moving boulders. He was pursued by the tower's guards, with whom he fought several skirmishes. In the process, he learned of their anatomical peculiarities, the features they shared with Caine's killer.

He fled through Shadow, and somehow they were able to pursue him, an exercise normally restricted to those who are related by blood to the royal family of Amber. He finally decided to head for the shadow Earth, where sister Flora dwelled.

In the meantime, he was contacted by Julian, via his Trump, and advised that Eric was contemplating taking the throne, in light of Dad's long and unaccountable absence. Various speculations had passed through his mind at this point, but there was really nothing he could do about the situation, one way or the other.

Arriving in California and discovering that his pursuers were still with him, Random had phoned Flora's place and I had received the call. He had flown over in response to my offer of assistance, and the creatures had not been far behind. The rest I knew.

Of all the conjectures we then made, the only one that seemed

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certain was that some part of the family itself was behind the entire business. That in mind, it seemed advisable to have at hand every weapon available to me. So I fetched the Jewel of Judgment and took it down to the Pattern, where I went through the process of attuning it. This was a somewhat involved procedure, but its results were satisfactory. After that, I was able to use it for purposes of controlling the elements.

I then questioned Flora at some length as to how she had come to be my warden off on that shadow Earth. She alleged having encountered me by accident, in France, on the eve of those events which so delight historical novelists, around the end of the eighteenth century. She had told Eric of this and became his confidante as to how I had gotten where I was. She agreed to take up residence in that place and keep an eye on me in return for favors to come. She refused to admit any direct involvement in my accident. It seemed to me that she knew more than she was telling, but I was in an awkward position when it came to pressing her on that point; that is, I was still missing a few days from my memory collection, and this was a matter I wanted to keep to myself. She agreed to identify the corpse of Caine's slayer as of the same ilk as those who had once pursued Random into her home. She agreed to support me in anything I might be about. Blessed are the pure in heart. I went and got drunk in my tomb and told Ganelon my troubles.

The following day, Gérard accompanied me to the Grove of the Unicorn, to retrieve Caine's body. On the way, he paused to beat me unconscious, to show me he could still do it, to show me he could make good on what he then promised; *i.e.*, that he would kill me if I should turn out to be the one behind the plot that was obviously underfoot, overhead and pressing in on all sides. The others, he informed me, were watching his performance over his Trump, so that any reprisal against him would constitute an admission of guilt on my part. I told him—and my viewing audience, by proxy—that this did not necessarily follow, and I had to let it go at that. There was nothing much else that I could do.

We proceeded to the grove and disinterred Caine. While we were about it, the unicorn put in an appearance. I had never seen it before and neither had Gérard. I hoped it was a good omen, for the beast is the patron of Amber.

Then we headed back, and I had a definite course of action in mind for a change, for that Evening. One that involved —unavoidably—cooperation on the part of the family.

VI.

LIFE'S INCESSANT ceremonies leap everlasting, humans spring eternal on hope's breast and frying pans without fires are often far between: the sum of my long life's wisdom that evening, tendered in a spirit of creative anxiety, an-

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swered by Random with a nod and a friendly obscenity.

We were in the library, and I was seated on the edge of the big desk. Random occupied a chair to my right. Gérard stood at the other end of the room, inspecting some weapons that hung on the wall. Or maybe it was Rein's etching of the unicorn he was looking at. Whichever, along with ourselves, he was also ignoring Julian, who was slouched in an easy chair beside the display cases, right center, legs extended and crossed at the ankles, arms folded, staring down at his scaley boots. Fiona —five-two, perhaps, in height —green eyes fixed on Flora's blue own as they spoke, there beside the fireplace, hair more than compensating for the vacant hearth, smouldering, reminded me, as always, of something from which the artist had just drawn back, setting aside his tools, questions slowly forming behind his smile. The place at the base of her throat where his thumb had notched the collarbone always drew my eyes as the mark of a master craftsman, especially when she raised her head, quizzical or imperious, to regard us taller others. She smiled faintly, just then, doubtless aware of my gaze, an almost clairvoyant faculty the acceptance of which has never deprived of its ability to disconcert. Llewella, off in a corner, pretending to study a book, had her back to the rest of us, her green tresses bobbed a couple inches above her dark collar. Whether her withdrawal involved animus, self-consciousness in her alienation or simple caution, I could never be certain. Probably something of all these. Hers was not that familiar a presence in Amber.

. . . . And the fact that we constituted a collection of individuals rather than a group, a family, at a time when I wanted to achieve some over-identity, some will to cooperate, was what led to my observations and Random's acknowledgement.

I felt a familiar presence, heard a "Hello, Corwin" and there was Deirdre, reaching toward me. I extended my hand, clasped her own, raised it. She took a step forward, as if to the first strain of some formal dance and moved close, facing me. For an instant, a grilled window had framed her head and shoulders and a rich tapestry had adorned the wall to her left. Planned and posed, of course. Still, effective. She held my Trump in her left hand. She smiled. The others glanced our way as she appeared and she hit them all with that smile, like the Mona Lisa with a machine gun, turning slowly.

"Corwin," she said, kissing me briefly and withdrawing, "I fear I am early."

"Never," I replied, turning toward Random, who had just risen and who anticipated me by seconds.

"May I fetch you a drink, sister?" he asked, taking her hand and nodding toward the sideboard.

"Why, yes. Thank you," and he led her off and poured her some wine, avoiding or at least postpon-

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ing, I suppose, her usual clash with Flora. At least, I assumed most of the old frictions were still alive as I remembered them. So if it cost me her company for the moment it also maintained the domestic tranquility index, which was important to me just then. Random can be good at such things when he wants to.

I drummed the side of the desk with my fingertips, I rubbed my aching shoulder, I uncrossed and recrossed my legs, I debated lighting a cigarette. . .

Suddenly, he was there. At the far end of the room, Gérard had turned to his left, said something and extended his hand. An instant later, he was clasping the left and only hand of Benedict, the final member of our group.

All right. The fact that Benedict had chosen to come in on Gérard's Trump rather than mine was his way of expressing his feelings toward me. Was it also an indication of an alliance to keep me in check? It was at least calculated to make me wonder. Could it have been Benedict who had put Gérard up to our morning's exercise? Quite possibly.

At that moment, Julian rose to his feet, crossed the room, gave Benedict a word and a handclasp. This activity attracted Llewella. She turned, closing her book and laying it aside. Smiling then, she advanced and greeted Benedict, nodded to Julian, said something to Gérard. The impromptu conference warmed, grew animated. All right again, and again.

Four and three. And two in the middle. . .

I waited, staring at the group across the room. We were all present, and I could have asked them for attention and proceeded with what I had in mind. However. . .

It was too tempting. All of us could feel the tension, I knew. It was as if a pair of magnetic poles had suddenly been activated within the room. I was curious to see how all the filings would fall.

Flora gave me one quick glance. I doubted she had changed her mind overnight —unless, of course, there had been some new development. No, I felt confident that I had anticipated the next move.

Nor was I incorrect. I overheard her mentioning thirst and a glass of wine. She turned partway and made a move in my direction, as if expecting Fiona to accompany her. She hesitated a moment when this did not occur, suddenly became the focus of the entire company's attention, realized this fact, made a quick decision, smiled and moved in my direction.

"Corwin," she said, "I believe I would like a glass of wine."

Without turning my head or removing my gaze from the tableau before me, I called back over my shoulder, "Random, pour Flora a glass of wine, would you?"

"But of course," he replied, and I heard the necessary sounds.

Flora nodded, unsmiled and passed beyond me to the right.

Four and four, leaving dear Fiona burning brightly in the middle of the room. Totally self-conscious and enjoying it, she turned immediately toward the

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oval mirror with the dark, intricately carved frame, hanging in the space between the two nearest tiers of shelves. She proceeded to adjust a stray strand of hair in the vicinity of her left temple.

Her movement produced a flash of green and silver among the red and gold geometries of the carpet, near to the place where her left foot had rested.

I had simultaneous desires to curse and to smile. The arrant bitch was playing games with us again. Always remarkable, though. . . Nothing had changed. Neither cursing nor smiling, I moved forward, as she had known I would.

But Julian, too, approached, and a trifle more quickly than I. He had been a bit nearer, may have spotted it a fraction of an instant sooner.

He scooped it up and dangled it gently.

"Your bracelet, sister," he said pleasantly, "It seems to have forsaken your wrist, foolish thing. —Here. Allow me."

She extended her hand, giving him one of those lowered-eyelash smiles while he refastened her chain of emeralds. Completing the business, he folded her hand within both of his own and began to turn back toward his corner, from whence the others were casting sidelong glances while attempting to seem locally occupied.

"I believe you would be amused by a witticism we are about to share—" he began.

Her smile grew even more delightful as she disengaged her hand.

"Thank you, Julian," she replied. "I am certain that when I hear it I will laugh. Last, as usual, I fear." She turned and took my arm. "I find that I feel a greater desire," she said, "for a glass of wine."

So I took her back with me and saw her refreshed. Five and four.

Julian, who dislikes showing strong feelings, reached a decision a few moments later and followed us over. He poured himself a glass, sipped from it, studied me for ten or fifteen seconds, then said, "I believe we are all present now. When do you plan proceeding with whatever you have in mind?"

"I see no reason for further delay," I said, "now that everyone has had his turn." I raised my voice then and directed it across the room. "The time has come. Let us get comfortable."

The others drifted over. Chairs were dragged up and settled into. More wine was poured. A minute later we had an audience.

"Thank you," I said when the final stirrings had subsided. "I have a number of things I would like to say, and some of them might even get said. The course of it all will depend on what goes before, and we will get into that right now. Random, tell them what you told me yesterday."

"All right."

I withdrew to the seat behind the desk and Random moved to occupy the edge of it. I leaned back and listened again to the story of his communication with

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Brand and his attempt to rescue him. It was a condensed version, bereft of the speculations which had not really strayed from my consciousness since Random had put them there. And despite their omission, a tacit awareness of the implications was occurring within all the others. I knew that. It was the main reason I had wanted Random to speak first. Had I simply come out with an attempt to make a case for my suspicions, I would almost certainly have been assumed to be engaged in the time-honored practice of directing attention away from myself—an act to be followed immediately by the separate, sharp, metallic clicks of minds snapping shut against me. This way, despite any thoughts that Random would say whatever I wanted him to say, they would hear him out, wondering the while. They would toy with the ideas, attempting to foresee the point of my having called the assembly in the first place. They would allow the time that would permit the premises to take root contingent upon later corroboration. And they would be wondering whether we could produce the evidence. I was wondering that same thing myself.

While I waited and wondered I watched the others, a fruitless yet inevitable exercise. Simple curiosity, more than suspicion even, required that I search these faces for reactions, clues, indications —the faces that I knew better than any others, to the limits of my understanding such things. And of course they told me nothing. Perhaps it is true that you really only look at a person the first time that you see him, and after that you do a quick bit of mental shorthand each time that you recognize him. My brain is lazy enough to give that its likelihood, using its abstracting powers and a presumption of regularity to avoid work whenever possible. This time I forced myself to see though, and it still did not help. Julian maintained his slightly bored, slightly amused mask. Gérard appeared alternately surprised, angry and wistful. Benedict just looked bleak and suspicious. Llewella seemed as sad and inscrutable as ever. Deirdre looked distracted, Flora aquiescent and Fiona was studying everyone else, myself included, assembling her own catalogue of reactions.

The only thing that I could tell, after some time, was that Random was making an impression. While no one betrayed himself, I saw the boredom vanish, the old suspicion abate, the new suspicion come to life. Interest rose among my kin. Fascination, almost. Then everyone had questions. At first a few, then a barrage.

"Wait," I finally interrupted. "Let him finish. The whole thing. Some of these will answer themselves. Get the others afterwards."

There were nods and growls, and Random proceeded through to the real end. That is, he carried it on to our fight with the beastmen at Flora's, indicating that they were of the same ilk as the one who had slain Caine.

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Flora endorsed this part.

Then, when the questions came, I watched them carefully. So long as they dealt with the matter of Random's story, they were all to the good. But I wanted to cut things short of speculation as to the possibility of one of us being behind it all. As soon as that came out, talk of me and the smell of red herring would also drift in. This could lead to ugly words and the emergence of a mood I was not anxious to engender. Better to go for the proof first, save on later recriminations, corner the culprit right now if possible and consolidate my position on the spot.

So I watched and waited. When I felt that the vital moment had ticked its way too near I stopped the clock.

"None of this discussion, this speculation, would be necessary," I said, "if we had all of the facts right now. And there may be a way to get them—right now. That is why you are here."

That did it. I had them. Attentive. Ready. Maybe even willing.

"I propose we attempt to reach Brand and bring him home," I said, "now."

"How?" Benedict asked me.

"The Trumps."

"It has been tried," said Julian. "He cannot be reached that way. No response."

"I was not referring to the ordinary usage," I said. "I asked you all to bring full sets of Trumps with you. I trust that you have them?"

There were nods.

"Good," I said. "Let us shuffle out Brand's Trump now. I propose that all nine of us attempt to contact him simultaneously."

"An interesting thought," Benedict said.

"Yes," Julian agreed, producing his deck and riffling through it. "Worth trying, at least. It may generate additional power. I do not really know."

I located Brand's Trump. I waited until all the others had found it. Then, "Let us coordinate things," I said. "Is everyone ready?"

Eight assents were spoken.

"Then go ahead. Try. Now."

I studied my card. Brand's features were similar to my own, but he was shorter and slenderer. His hair was like Fiona's. He wore a green riding suit. He rode a white horse. How long ago? How long ago was that? I wondered. Something of a dreamer, a mystic, a poet, Brand was always disillusioned or elated, cynical or wholly trusting. His feelings never seemed to find a middle ground. Manic-depressive is too facile a term for his complex character, yet might serve to indicate a direction of departure, multitudes of qualifications lining the roadway thereafter. Pursuant to this state of affairs, I must admit that there were times when I found him so charming, considerate and loyal that I valued him above all my other kin. Other times, however, he could be so bitter, sarcastic and downright savage that I tried to avoid his company for fear I might do him harm. Summing up, the last time that I had seen him had been one

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of the latter occasions, just a bit before Eric and I had had the falling out that led to my exile from Amber.

. . . . And those were my thoughts and feelings as I studied his Trump, reaching out to him with my mind, my will, opening the vacant place I sought him to fill. About me, the others shuffled their own memories and did the same.

Slowly, the card took on a dream-dust quality and acquired the illusion of depth. There followed that familiar blurring, with the sense of movement which heralds contact with the subject. The Trump grew colder beneath my fingertips, and then things flowed and formed, achieving a sudden verity of vision, persistent, dramatic, full.

He seemed to be in a cell. There was a stone wall behind him. There was straw on the floor. He was manacled, and his chain ran back through a huge ring bolt set in the wall above and behind him. It was a fairly long chain, providing sufficient slack for movement, and at the moment he was taking advantage of this fact, lying sprawled on a heap of straw and rags, off in the corner. His hair and beard were quite long, his face thinner than I had ever before seen it. His clothes were tattered and filthy. He seemed to be sleeping. My mind went back to my own imprisonment—the smells, the cold, the wretched fare, the dampness, the loneliness, the madness that came and went. At least he still had his eyes, for they flickered and I saw them when several of us spoke his name: green they were, with a flat, vacant look.

Was he drugged? Or did he believe himself to be hallucinating?

But suddenly his spirit returned. He raised himself. He extended his hand.

"Brothers!" he said. "Sisters. . ."

"I'm coming!" came a shout that shook the room.

Gérard had leaped to his feet, knocking over his chair. He dashed across the room and snatched a great battle axe from its pegs on the wall. He slung it at his wirst, holding the Trump in that same hand. For a moment he froze, studying the card. Then he extended his free hand and suddenly he was there, clasping Brand, who chose that moment to pass out again. The image wavered. The contact was broken.

Cursing, I sought through the pack after Gérard's own Trump. Several of the others seemed to be doing the same thing. Locating it, I moved for contact. Slowly, the melting, the turning, the re-forming occurred. There!

Gérard had drawn the chain taut across the stones of the wall and was attacking it with the axe. It was a heavy thing, however, and resisted his powerful blows for a long while. Eventually, several of the links were mashed and scarred, but by then he had been at it for almost two minutes, and the ringing, chopping sounds had alerted the jailers.

For there were noises from the left—a rattling sound, the sliding

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of bolts, the creaking of hinges. Although my field of perception did not extend that far, it seemed obvious that the cell's door was being opened. Brand raised himself once more. Gérard continued to hack at the chain.

"Gérard! The door!" I shouted.

"I know!" he bellowed, wrapping the chain about his arm and yanking it. It did not yield.

Then he let go the chain and swung the axe, as one of the horny handed warriors rushed him, blade upraised. The swordsman fell, to be replaced by another. Then a third and a fourth crowded by them. Others were close on their heels.

There was a blur of movement at that moment and Random knelt within the tableau, his right hand clasped with Brand's, his left holding his chair before him like a shield, its legs pointing outward. He sprang to his feet and rushed the attackers, driving the chair like a battering ram into their midst. They fell back. He raised the chair and swung it. One lay dead on the floor, fallen to Gérard's axe. Another had drawn off to one side, clutching at the stump of his right arm. Random produced a dagger and left it in a nearby stomach, brained two more with the chair and drove the final man back. Eerily, while this was going on, the dead man rose above the floor and slowly drifted upward, spilling and dripping the while. The one who had been stabbed collapsed to his knees, clutching at the blade.

In the meantime, Gérard had taken hold of the chain with both hands. He braced one foot against the wall and commenced to pull. His shoulders rose as the great muscles tightened across his back. The chain held. Ten seconds, perhaps. Fifteen. . .

Then, with a snap and a rattle, it parted. Gérard stumbled backward, catching himself with an outflung hand. He glanced back, apparently at Random, who was out of my line of sight at the moment. Seemingly satisfied, he turned away, stooped and raised Brand, who had fallen unconscious again. Holding him in his arms, he turned and extended one hand from beneath the limp form. Random leaped back into sight beside them, *sans* chair, and gestured to us also.

All of us reached for them, and a moment later they stood in our midst and we crowded round.

A sort of cheer had gone up as we rushed to touch him, to see him, our brother who had been gone these many years and just now snatched back from his mysterious captors. And at last, hopefully, finally, some answers might also have been liberated. Only he looked so weak, so thin, so pale. . .

"Get back!" Gérard shouted. "I'm taking him to the couch! Then you can look all you—"

Dead silence. For everyone had backed off, and then turned to stone. This was because there was blood on Brand, and it was dripping. And this was because there was a knife in his left side, to the rear. It had not been there moments before. Some one of us had just tried for his kidney and pos-

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sibly succeeded. I was not heartened by the fact that the Random-Corwin Conjecture that it was One Of Us Behind It All had just received a significant boost. I had an instant during which to concentrate all my faculties in an attempt to mentally photograph everyone's position. Then the spell was broken. Gérard bore Brand to the couch and we drew aside; and we all knew that we all realized not only what had happened, but what it implied.

Gérard set Brand down in a prone position and tore away his filthy shirt.

"Get me clean water, to bathe him," he said. "And towels. Get me saline solution and glucose and something to hang them from. Get me a whole medical kit."

Deirdre and Flora moved toward the door.

"My quarters are closest," said Random. "One of you will find a medical kit there. But the only IV stuff is in the lab on the third floor. I'd better come and help."

They departed together.

We had all had medical training somewhere along the line, both here and abroad. That which we learned in Shadow though, had to be modified in Amber. Most antibiotics from the shadow worlds, for example, were ineffectual here. On the other hand, our personal immunological processes appear to behave differently from those of any other peoples we have studied, so that it is much more difficult for us to become infected—and, if infected, we deal with it more expeditiously. Then, too, we possess profound regenerative abilities.

All of which is as it must be, of course, the ideal necessarily being superior to its shadows. And Amberites that we are, and aware of these facts from an early age, all of us obtained medical training relatively soon in life. Basically, despite what is often said about being your own physician, it goes back to our not unjustified distrust of virtually everyone, and most particularly those who might hold our lives in their hands. All of which partly explains why I did not rush to shoulder Gérard aside to undertake Brand's treatment myself, despite the fact that I had been through a med school on the shadow Earth within the past couple generations. The other part of the explanation is that Gérard was not letting anyone else near Brand. Julian and Fiona had both moved forward, apparently with the same thing in mind, only to encounter Gérard's left arm like a gate at a railway crossing.

"No," he had said. "I know that I did not do it, and that is all that I know. There will be no second chance for anyone else."

With any one of us sustaining that sort of wound while in an otherwise sound condition, I would say that if he made it through the first half hour he would make it. Brand, though. . . The shape he was in. . . There was no telling.

When the others returned with the materials and equipment, Gérard cleaned Brand, sutured

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the wound and dressed it. He hooked up the IV, broke off the manacles with a hammer and chisel Random had located, covered Brand with a sheet and a blanket and took his pulse again.

"How is it?" I asked.

"Weak," he said, and he drew up a chair and seated himself beside the couch. "Someone fetch me my blade—and a glass of wine. I didn't have any. Also, if there is any food left over there, I'm hungry."

Llewella headed for the sideboard and Random got him his blade from the rack behind the door.

"Are you just going to camp there?" Random asked, passing him the weapon.

"I am."

"What about moving Brand to a better bed?"

"He is all right where he is. I will decide when he can be moved. In the meantime, someone get a fire going. Then put out a few of those candles."

Random nodded.

"I'll do it," he said. Then he picked up the knife Gérard had drawn from Brand's side, a thin stiletto, its blade about seven inches in length. He held it across the palm of his hand.

"Does anyone recognize this?" he asked.

"Not I," said Benedict.

"Nor I," said Julian.

"No," I said.

The girls shook their heads.

Random studied it.

"Easily concealed—up a sleeve, in a boot or bodice. It took real nerve to use it that way. . ."

"Desperation," I said.

". . . .And a very accurate anticipation of our mob scene. Inspired, almost."

"Could one of the guards have done it?" Julian asked. "Back in the cell?"

"No," Gérard said. "None of them came near enough."

"It looks to be decently balanced for throwing," Deirdre said.

"It is," said Random, shifting it about his fingertips. "Only none of them had a clear shot or the opportunity. I'm positive."

Llewella returned, bearing a tray containing slabs of meat, half a loaf of bread, a bottle of wine and a goblet. I cleared a small table and set it beside Gérard's chair. As Llewella deposited the tray, she asked, "But why? That only leaves us. Why would one of us want to do it?"

I sighed.

"Whose prisoner do you think he might have been?" I asked.

"One of us?"

"If he possessed knowledge someone was willing to go to this length to suppress, what do you think? The same reason also served to put him where he was and keep him there."

Her brows tightened.

"That does not make sense either. Why didn't they just kill him and be done with it?"

"Must have had some use for him," I said. "But there is really only one person who can answer that question adequately. When you find him, ask him."

"Or her," Julian said. "Sister, you seem possessed of a

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superabundance of naiveté, suddenly."

Her gaze locked with Julian's own, a pair of icebergs reflecting frigid infinities.

"As I recall," she said, "you rose from your seat when they came through, turned to the left, rounded the desk and stood slightly to Gérard's right. You leaned pretty far forward. I believe your hands were out of sight, below."

". . . . And as I recall," he said, "you were within striking distance yourself, off to Gérard's left—and leaning forward."

"I would have had to do it with my left hand—and I am right-handed."

"Perhaps he owes what life he still possesses to that fact."

"You seem awfully anxious, Julian, to find that it was someone else."

"All right," I said. "All right! You know this is self-defeating. Only one of us did it, and this is not the way to smoke him out."

". . . . Or her," Julian added.

Gérard rose, towered, glared.

"I will not have you disturbing my patient," he said. "And Random, you said you were going to see to the fire."

"Right away," Random said, and moved to do it.

"Let us adjourn to the sitting room off the main hall," I said, "downstairs. —Gérard, I will post a couple guards outside the door here."

"No," Gérard said. "I would rather that anyone who wishes to try it get this far. I will hand you his head in the morning."

I nodded.

"Well, you can ring for anything you need—or call one of us on the Trumps. We will fill you in in the morning on anything that we learn."

"Gérard seated himself, grunted and began eating. Random got the fire going and extinguished some lights. Brand's blanket rose and fell, slowly but regularly. We filed quietly from the room and headed for the stairway, leaving them there together with the flare and the crackle, the tubes and the bottles.

VII.

MANY ARE THE times I have awakened, sometimes shaking, always afraid, from the dream that I occupied my old cell, blind once more, in the dungeons beneath Amber. It is not as if I were unfamiliar with the condition of imprisonment. I have been locked away on a number of occasions, for various periods of time. But solitary, plus blindness with small hope of recovery, made for a big charge at the sensory deprivation counter in the department store of the mind. That, with the sense of finality to it all, had left its marks. I generally keep these memories safely tucked away during waking hours, but at night, sometimes, they come loose, dance down the aisles and frolic round the notions counter, one, two, three. Seeing Brand there in his cell had brought them out again, along with an unseasonal chill; and that final thrust served to establish a more or less perma-

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nent residence for them. Now, among my kin in the shield-hung sitting room, I could not avoid the thought that one or more of them had done unto Brand as Eric had done unto me. While this capacity was in itself hardly a surprising discovery, the matter of occupying the same room with the culprit and having no idea as to his identity was more than a little disturbing. My only consolation was that each of the others, according to his means, must be disturbed also. Including the guilty party, now that the existence theorem had shown a positive. I knew then that I had been hoping all along that outsiders were entirely to blame. Now, though. . . On the one hand, I felt even more restricted than usual in what I could say. On the other, it seemed a good time to press for information, with everyone in an abnormal state of mind. The desire to cooperate for purposes of dealing with the threat could prove helpful. And even the guilty party would want to behave the same as everyone else. Who knew but that he might slip up while making the effort?

"Well, have you any other interesting little experiments you would care to conduct?" Julian asked me, clasping his hands behind his head and leaning back in my favorite chair.

"Not at the moment," I said.

"Pity," he replied. "I was hoping you would suggest we go looking for Dad now in the same fashion. Then, if we are lucky, we find him and someone puts him out of the way with more certainty. After that, we could all play Russian Roulette with those fine new weapons you've furnished—winner take all."

"Your words are ill-considered," I said.

"Not so. I considered every one of them," he answered. "We spend so much time lying to one another that I decided it might be amusing to say what I really felt. Just to see whether anyone noticed."

"Now you see that we have. We also notice that the real you is no improvement over the old one."

"Whichever you prefer, both of us have been wondering whether you have any idea what you are going to do next."

"I do," I said. "I now intend to obtain answers to a number of questions dealing with everything that is plaguing us. We might as well start with Brand and his troubles." Turning toward Benedict, who was sitting gazing into the fire, I said, "Back in Avalon, Benedict, you told me that Brand was one of the ones who searched for me after my disappearance."

"That is correct," Benedict answered.

"All of us went looking," Julian said.

"Not at first," I replied. "Initially, it was Brand, Gérard and yourself, Benedict. Isn't that what you told me?"

"Yes," he said. "The others did have a go at it later, though. I told you that, too."

I nodded.

"Did Brand report anything

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unusual at that time?" I asked him.

"Unusual? In what way?" said Benedict.

"I don't know. I am looking for some connection between what happened to him and what happened to me."

"Then you are looking in the wrong place," Benedict said. "He returned and reported no success. And he was around for ages after that, unmolested."

"I gathered that much," I said. "I understand from what Random has told me, though, that his final disappearance occured approximately a month before my own recovery and return. That almost strikes me as peculiar. If he did not report anything special after his return from the search, did he do so prior to his disappearance? Or in the interim? —Anyone? Anything? Say it if you've got it!"

There followed some mutual glancing about. The looks seemed more curious than suspicious or nervous, though.

Finally, then, "Well," Llewella said, "I do not know. Do not know whether it is significant, I mean."

All eyes came to rest upon her. She began to knot and unknot the ends of her belt cord, slowly, as she spoke.

"It was in the interim, and it may have no bearing," she went on. "It is just something that struck me as peculiar. Brand came to Rebma long ago—"

"How long ago?" I asked.

She furrowed her brow.

"Fifty, sixty, seventy years. . . I am not certain. . ."

I tried to summon up the rough conversion factor I had worked out during my long incarceration. A day in Amber, it seemed, constituted a bit over two and a half days on the shadow Earth where I had spent my exile. I wanted to relate events in Amber to my own time-scale whenever possible, just in case any peculiar correspondences turned up. So Brand went to Rebma sometime in what was, to me, the nineteenth century.

"Whatever the date," she said, "he came and visited me. Stayed for several weeks." She glanced at Random then. "He was asking about Martin."

Random narrowed his eyes and cocked his head.

"Did he say why?" he asked her.

"Not exactly," she said. "He implied that he had met Martin, somewhere, in his travels, and he gave the impression that he would like to get in touch with him again. I did not realize until some time after his departure that finding out everything he could concerning Martin was probably the entire reason for his visit. You know how subtle Brand can be, finding out things without seeming to be after them. It was only after I had spoken with a number of others whom he had visited that I began to see what had occurred. I never did find out why, though."

"That is—most peculiar. . ." Random observed. "For it brings to mind something to which I had never attached any significance. He once questioned me at great length concerning my son—and it may well have been at about that

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same time. He never indicated that he had met him, however —or that he had any desire to do so. It started out as a bit of banter on the subject of bastards. When I took offense he apologized and asked a number of more proper questions about the boy, which I assumed he then put for the sake of politeness—to leave me with a softer remembrance. As you say, though, he had a way of drawing admissions from people. —Why is it you never told me of this before?"

She smiled prettily.

"Why should I have?" she said.

Random nodded slowly, his face expressionless.

"Well, what did you tell him?" he said. "What did he learn? What do you know about Martin that I don't?"

She shook her head, her smile fading.

"Nothing—actually," she said. "To my knowledge, no one in Rebma ever heard from Martin after he took the Pattern and vanished. I do not believe that Brand departed knowing any more than when he arrived."

"Strange. . ." I said. "Did he approach anyone else on the subject?"

"I don't remember," Julian said.

"Nor I," said Benedict.

The others shook their heads.

"Then let us note it and leave it for now," I said. "There are other things I also need to know. —Julian, I understand that you and Gérard attempted to follow the black road awhile back, and that Gérard was injured along the way. I believe you both stayed with Benedict for a time after that, while Gérard recuperated. I would like to know about that expedition."

"It seems as if you already do," Julian replied. "You have just stated everything that occurred."

"Where did you learn of this, Corwin?" Benedict inquired.

"Back in Avalon," I said.

"From whom?"

"Dara," I said.

He rose to his feet, came over, stood before me, glared down.

"You still persist in that absurd story—about the girl!"

I sighed.

"We have been round and round on this too many times," I said. "By now I have told you everything that I know on the subject. Either you accept it or you do not. She is the one who told me, though."

"Apparently then there were some things you did not tell me. You never mentioned that part before."

"Is it true or isn't it? About Julian and Gérard."

"It is true," he said.

"Then forget the source for now and let us get on with what happened."

"Agreed," Benedict said. "I may speak candidly, now that the reason for secrecy is no longer with us. Eric, of course. He was unaware of my whereabouts, as were most of the others. Gérard was my main source of news in Amber. Eric grew more and more apprehensive concerning the black road and finally decided to send scouts to trace it through

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Shadow to its source. Julian and Gérard were selected. They were attacked by a very strong party of its creatures at a point near Avalon. Gérard called to me, via my Trump, for assistance and I went to their aid. The enemy was dispatched. As Gérard had sustained a broken leg in the fighting and Julian was a bit battered himself, I took them both home with me. I broke my silence with Eric at that time, to tell him where they were and what had become of them. He ordered them not to continue their journey, but to return to Amber after they had recovered. They remained with me until they did. Then they went back."

"That is all?"

"That is all."

But it wasn't. Dara had also told me something else. She had mentioned another visitor. I remembered it quite distinctly. That day, beside the stream, a tiny rainbow in the mist above the waterfall, the mill wheel turning round and round, delivering dreams and grinding them, that day we had fenced and talked and walked in Shadow, had passed through a primordial wood, coming to a spot beside a mighty torrent where turned a wheel fit for the granary of the gods, that day we had picnicked, flirted, gossiped, she had told me many things, some of them doubtless false. But she had not lied concerning the journey of Julian and Gérard, and I believed it possible that she had also spoken truly when she said that Brand had visited Benedict in Avalon. "Frequently" was the word she had used.

Now, Benedict made no secret of the fact that he distrusted me. I could see this alone as sufficient reason for his withholding information on anything he judged too sensitive to become my business. Hell, buying his story, I would not have trusted me either if our situations were reversed. Only a fool would have called him on it at that moment, though. Because or the other possibilities.

It could be that he planned to tell me later, in private, of the circumstances surrounding Brand's visits. They could well have involved something he did not wish to discuss before the group, and especially before Brand's would-be killer.

Or— There was, of course, the possibility that Benedict himself was behind it all. I did not even like to think about the consequences. Having served under Napoleon, Lee and MacArthur, I appreciated the tactician as well as the strategist. Benedict was both, and he was the best I had ever known. The recent loss of his right arm had in no way diminished him in this, or for that matter impaired his personal fighting skills. Had I not been very lucky recently he could easily have turned me into a pile of scallops over our misunderstanding. No, I did not want it to be Benedict, and I was not about to grope after whatever he had, at that moment, seen fit to conceal. I only hoped that he was just saving it for later.

So I settled for his, "That is

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all," and decided to move on to other matters.

"Flora," I said, "back when I first visited you, after my accident, you said something which I still do not quite understand. In that I had ample time relatively soon thereafter in which to review many things, I came across it in my memories and occasionally puzzled over it. I still do not understand it. So would you please tell me what you meant when you said that the shadows contained more horrors than any had thought?"

"Why, I do not properly recall saying it," Flora said. "But I suppose that I must have, if it made such an impression. You know the effect that I was referring to: that Amber seems to act as something of a magnet on adjacent shadows, drawing things across from them; the nearer you get to Amber the easier the road becomes, even for shadow-things. While there always seems to be some exchange of materials among adjacent shadows themselves, the effect is more forceful and also more of a one-way process when it comes to Amber. We have always been alert for peculiar things slipping through. Well, for several years prior to your recovery, more such things than usual seemed to be showing up in the vicinity of Amber. Dangerous things, almost invariably. Many were recognizable creatures from nearby realsm. After a time though, things kept coming in from farther and farther afield. Eventually, some which were totally unknown made it through. No reason could be found for this sudden transportation of menaces, although we sought fairly far for disturbances which might be driving them this way. In other words, highly improbable penetrations of Shadow were occurring."

"This actually began while Dad was still around?"

"Oh, yes. It started several years before your recovery—as I said."

"I see. Did anyone consider the possibility of there being a connection between this state of affairs and Dad's departure?"

"Certainly," Benedict replied. "I still feel that that was the reason for it. He went off to investigate, or to seek a remedy."

"But that is purely conjecture," Julian said. "You know how he was. He gave no reasons."

Benedict shrugged.

"It is a reasonable inference, though," he said. "I understand that he had spoken of his concern over the—monster migrations, if you like—on numerous occasions."

I withdrew my cards from their case, having recently gotten into the habit of carrying a set of Trumps with me at all times. I raised Gérard's Trump and regarded it. The others were silent, watching me as I did this. Moments later, there was contact.

Gérard was still seated in his chair, his blade across his knees. He was still eating. He swallowed when he felt my presence and said, "Yes, Corwin? What do you want?"

"How is Brand?"

"Sleeping," he said. "His pulse

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is a little stronger. His breathing is the same—regular. It's still too early—"

"I know," I said. "I mainly wanted to check your recollection of something? Near the end there, did you get the impression from anything he might have said or done that Dad's going away might have been connected with the increased number of Shadow beings that were slipping through into Amber?"

"That," said Julian, "is what is known as a leading question."

Gérard wiped his mouth.

"There could have been a connection, yes," he said. "He seemed disturbed, preoccupied with something. And he did talk about the creatures. But he never really said that that was his main concern—or whether it was something entirely different."

"Like what?"

He shook his head.

"Anything. I— Yes. . . Yes, there is something you probably ought to know, for whatever it is worth. Some time after his disappearance, I did make an effort to find out one thing. That was, whether I was indeed the last person to see him before his departure. I am fairly certain that I was. I had been there in the palace all evening, and I was preparing to return to the flagship. Dad had retired about an hour earlier, but I had stayed on in the guard room, playing draughts with the Captain. As we were sailing the following morning, I decided to take a book with me. So I came up here to the library. Dad was seated at the desk." He gestured with his head. "He was going through some old books, and he had not yet changed his garments. He nodded to me when I entered, and I told him I had just come up for a book. He said, 'You've come to the right place,' and he kept on reading. While I was looking over the shelves, he said something to the effect that he could not sleep. I found a book, told him good night, he said, 'Good sailing,' and I left." He lowered his eyes again. "Now I am positive he was wearing the Jewel of Judgment that night, that I saw it on him then as plainly as I see it on you now. I am equally certain that he had not had it on earlier that evening. For a long while after, I thought that he had taken it along with him, wherever he went. There was no indication in his chambers that he had later changed his clothing. I never saw the stone again until you and Bleys were defeated in your assault on Amber. Then, Eric was wearing it. When I questioned him, he claimed that he had found it in Dad's chambers. Lacking evidence to the contrary, I had to accept his story. But I was never happy with it. Your question—and seeing you wearing it—has brought it all back. So I thought you had better know about it."

"Thanks," I said, and another question occurred to me but I decided against asking it at that moment. For the benefit of the others, I closed off by saying, "So do you think he needs any more blankets? Or anything else?"

Gérard raised his glass to me.

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"Very good. Keep up the good work," I said, and I passed my hand over his card.

"Brother Brand seems to be doing all right," I said, "and Gérard does not recollect Dad's saying anything that would directly connect Shadow slippage and his departure. I wonder how Brand will recall things, when he comes around?"

"*If* he comes around," Julian said.

"I think that he will," I said. "We have all taken some pretty bad beatings and we are still around. Our vitality is one of the few things we have come to trust. My guess is that he will be talking by morning."

"What do you propose doing with the guilty party," he asked, "if Brand names him?"

"Question him," I said.

"Then I would like to do the questioning. I am beginning to feel you may be right this time, Corwin, and that the person who stabbed him may also be responsible for our intermittent state of seige, for Dad's disappearance and for Caine's killing. So I would enjoy questioning him before we cut his thrtat, and I would like to volunteer for that last part also."

"We will keep it in mind," I said.

"You are not excluded from the reckoning, Corwin."

"I was aware of that."

"I have something to say," said Benedict, smothering a rejoinder from Julian. "I find myself troubled both by the strength and the apparent objective of the opposition. I have encountered them now on several occasions, and they *are* out for blood. Accepting for the moment your story of the girl Dara, Corwin, her final words do seem to sum up their attitude: 'Amber will be destroyed.' Not conquered, subjugated or taught a lesson. Destroyed. —Julian, you wouldn't mind ruling here, would you?"

Julian smiled.

"Perhaps next year this time," he said. "Not today, thank you."

"What I am getting at is that I could see you—or any of us —employing mercenaries or obtaining alllies to effect a takeover. I cannot see you employing a force so powerful that it would represent a grave problem itself afterwards. Not a force that seems bent on destruction rather than conquest. I cannot see you, me, Corwin, the others as actually trying to destroy Amber, or willing to gamble with forces that would. That is the part I do not like about Corwin's notion that one of us is behind this."

I had to nod. I was not unaware of the weakness of that link in my chain of speculations. Still, there were so many unknowns. . . I could offer alternatives, such as Random then did, but guesses prove nothing.

"It may be," Random said, "that one of us made the deal, but underestimated his allies. The guilty party may now be sweating this thing as much as the rest of us. He may not be in a position to turn things off now, even if he wants to."

"We could offer him the opportunity," Fiona said, "to betray his

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allies to us now. If Julian could be persuaded to leave his throat uncut and the rest of us were willing to do the same, he might come around—if Random's guess is correct. He would not claim the throne, but he was obviously not about to have it before. He would have his life and he could save Amber quite a bit of trouble. Is anyone willing to commit himself to a position on this?"

"I am," I said. "I will give him his life if he will come across, with the understanding that it will be spent in exile."

"I will go along with that," Benedict said.

"So will I," said Random.

"On one condition," Julian said. "If he was not personally responsible for Caine's death, I will go along with it. Otherwise, no. And there would have to be evidence."

"Life, in exile," Deirdre said. "All right. I agree."

"So do I," said Flora.

"And I," Llewella followed.

"Gérard will probably agree, too," I said. "But I really wonder whether Brand will feel the same as the rest of us? I've a feeling he may not."

"Let us check with Gérard," Benedict said. "If Brand makes it and proves the only holdout, the guilty party will know he has only one enemy to avoid—and they can always work out their own terms on that count."

"All right," I said, smothering a few misgivings, and I recontacted Gérard, who agreed also.

So we rose to our feet and swore that much by the Unicorn of Amber—Julian's oath having an extra clause to it—and swore to enforce exile on any of our own number who violated the oath. Frankly, I did not think it would net us anything, but it is always nice to see families doing things together.

After that, everyone made a point of mentioning that he would be remaining in the palace overnight, presumably to indicate that no one feared anything Brand might have to say in the morning—and especially to indicate that no one had a desire to get out of town, a thing that would not be forgotten, even if Brand gave up the ghost during the night. In that I had no further questions to put to the group and no one had sprung forward to own up to the misdeeds covered by the oath, I leaned back and listened for a time after that. Things came apart, falling into a series of conversations and exchanges, one of the main topics being an attempted reconstruction of the library tableau, each of us in his own place and, invariably, why each of us was in a position to have done it, except for the speaker. I smoked; I said nothing on the subject. Deirdre did spot an interesting possibility, however. Namely, that Gérard could have done the stabbing himself while we were all crowded around, and that his heroic efforts were not prompted by any desire to save Brand's neck, but rather to achieve a position where he could stop his tongue—in which case, Brand would never make it through the night. Ingenious, but

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I just couldn't believe it. No one else bought it either. At least, no one volunteered to go upstairs and throw Gérard out.

After a time, Fiona drifted over, sat beside me.

"Well, I've tried the only thing I could think of," she said. "I hope some good comes of it."

"It may," I said.

"I see that you have added a peculiar piece of ornamentation to your wardrobe," she said, raising the Jewel between her thumb and forefinger and studying it.

Then she raised her eyes.

"Can you make it do tricks for you?" she asked.

"Some," I said.

"Then you knew how to attune it. It involves the Pattern, doesn't it?"

"Yes. Eric told me how to go about it, right before he died."

"I see."

She released it, settled back into her seat.

"Did he give you any cautions to go along with it?" she asked.

"No," I said.

"I wonder whether that was a matter of design or circumstance?"

"Well, he was pretty busy dying at the time. That limited our conversation considerably."

"I know. I was wondering whether his hatred for you outweighed his hopes for the realm, or whether he was simply ignorant of some of the principles involved."

"What do you know about it?"

"Think again of Eric's death, Corwin. I was not there when it occurred, but I came in early for the funeral. I was present when his body was bathed, shaved, dressed—and I examined his wounds. I do not believe that any of them were fatal, in themselves. There were three chest wounds, but only one looked as if it might have run into the mediastinal area—"

"One's enough."

"Wait," she said. "It was difficult, but I tried judging the angle of the puncture with a thin glass rod. I wanted to make an incision, but Caine would not permit it. Still, I do not believe that his heart or arteries were damaged. It is still not too late to order an autopsy, if you would like me to check further on this. I am certain that his injuries and the general stress contributed to his death, but I believe it was the Jewel that made the difference."

"Why do you think this?"

"Because of some things that Dworkin said, when I studied with him—and things that I noticed afterwards, because of this. He indicated that while it conferred unusual abilities, it also represented a drain on the vitality of its master. The longer you wear it, the more it somehow takes out of you. I paid attention after that, and I noticed that Dad wore it only seldom and never kept it on for long periods of time."

My thoughts returned to Eric, the day he lay dying on the slopes of Kolvir, the battle raging about him. I remembered my first look at him, his face pale, his breath labored, blood on his chest. . . And the Jewel of Judgment, there on its chain, was pulsing, heart-

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like, among the moist folds of his garments. I had never seen it do that before, or since. I recalled that the effect had grown fainter, weaker. And when he died and I folded his hands atop it, the phenomenon had ceased.

"What do you know of its function?" I asked her.

She shook her head.

"Dworkin considered that a state secret. I know the obvious—weather control—and I inferred from some of Dad's remarks that it has something to do with a heightened perception, or a higher perception. Dworkin had mentioned it primarily as an example of the pervasiveness of the Pattern in everything that gives us power—even the Trumps contain the Pattern, if you look closely, look long enough—and he cited it as an instance of a conservation principle: all of our special powers have their price. The greater the power, the larger the investment. The Trumps are a small matter, but there is still an element of fatigue involved in their employment. Walking through Shadow, which is an exercise of the image of the Pattern which exists within us, is an even greater expenditure. To essay the Pattern itself, physically, is a massive drain on one's energies. But the Jewel, he said, represents an even higher octave of the same thing, and its cost to its employer is exponentially greater."

Thus, if correct, another ambiguous insight into the character of my late and least favored brother. If he were aware of this phenomenon and had donned the Jewel and worn it overlong anyhow, in the defense of Amber, it made him something of a hero. But then, seen in this light, his passing it along to me, without warnings, became a deathbed effort at a final piece of vengeance. But he had exempted me from his curse, he'd said, so as to spend it properly on our enemies in the field. This, of course, only meant that he hated them a little more than he hated me and was deploying his final energies as strategically as possible, for Amber. I thought then of the partial character of Dworkin's notes, as I had recovered them from the hiding place Eric had indicated. Could it be that Eric had acquired them intact and had purposely destroyed that portion containing the cautions, so as to damn his successor? That notion did not strike me as quite correct, for he had had no way of knowing that I would return when I did, as I did, that the course of battle would run as it had, and that I would indeed be his successor. It could just as easily have been one of his favorites that followed him to power, in which case he would certainly not have wanted him to inherit any booby traps. No. As I saw it, either Eric was not really aware of this property of the stone, having acquired only partial instructions for its use, or someone had gotten to those papers before I had and removed sufficient material to leave me with a mortal liability. It may well have been the hand of the real enemy, once again.

"Safety factor?" I asked.

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"No," she said. "I can give you only two pointers, for whatever they may be worth. The first is that I do not recall Dad's ever wearing it for long periods of time. The second, I pieced together from a number of things that he said, beginning with a comment to the effect that 'when people turn into statues you are either in the wrong place or in trouble'. I pressed him quite a bit on that, over a long period of time, and I eventually got the impression that the first sign of having worn it too long is some sort of distortion of your time sense. Apparently it begins speeding up the metabolism —everything—with a net effect that the world seems to be slowing down around you. This must take quite a toll on a person. That is everything that I know about it, and I admit that a large part of the last is guesswork. How long have you been wearing it?"

"Awhile now," I said, taking my mental pulse and glancing about to see whether things seemed to be slowing down any.

I could not really tell, though of course I did not feel in the best of shape. I had assumed it was totally Gérard's doing, though. I was not about to yank it off, however, just because another family member had suggested it, even if it was clever Fiona in one of her friendlier moods. Perversity, cussedness. . . No, independence. That was it. That and purely formal distrust. I had only put it on for the evening a few hours before, anyway. I'd wait.

"Well, you have made your point in wearing it," she was saying. "I simply wanted to advise you against prolonged exposure until you know more about it."

"Thanks, Fi. I'll have it off soon, and I appreciate your telling me. By the way, whatever became of Dworkin?"

She tapped her temple.

"His mind finally went, poor man. I like to think that Dad had him put away in some restful retreat in Shadow."

"I see what you mean," I said. "Yes, let us think that. Poor fellow."

Julian rose to his feet, concluding a conversation with Llewella. He stretched, nodded to her and strolled over.

"Corwin, have you thought of any more questions for us?" he said.

"None that I'd care to ask just now."

He smiled.

"Anything more that you want to tell us?"

"Not at the moment."

"Any more experiments, demonstrations, charades?"

"No."

"Good. Then I'm going to bed. Good night."

"Night."

He bowed to Fiona, waved to Benedict and Random, nodded to Flora and Deirdre as he passed them on the way to the door. He paused on the threshold, turned back and said, "Now you can all talk about me" and went on out.

"All right," Fiona said. "Let's. I think he's the one."

"Why?" I asked.

"I'll go down the list, subjec-

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tive, intuitive and biased as it is. Benedict, in my opinion, is above suspicion. If he wanted the throne, he'd have it by now, by direct, military methods. With all the time he has had, he could have managed an attack that would have succeeded, even against Dad. He is that good, and we all know it. You, on the other hand, have made a number of blunders which you would not have made had you been in full possession of your faculties. That is why I believe your story, amnesia and all. No one gets himself blinded as a piece of strategy. Gérard is well on the way to establishing his own innocence. I almost think he is up there with Brand now more for that reason than from any desire to protect Brand. At any rate, we will know for sure before long—or else have some new suspicions. Random has simply been watched too closely these past years to have had the opportunity to engineer everything that has been happening. So he is out. Of us more delicate sorts, Flora hasn't the brains, Deirdre lacks the guts, Llewella hasn't the motivations, as she is happy elsewhere but never here, and I, of course, am innocent of all but malice. That leaves Julian. Is he capable? Yes. Does he want the throne? Of course. Has he had time and opportunity? Again, yes. He is your man."

"Would he have killed Caine?" I asked. "They were buddies."

She curled her lip.

"Julian has no friends," she said. "That icy personality of his is thawed only by thoughts of himself. Oh, in recent years he *seemed* closer to Caine than to anyone else. But even that. . . Even that could have been a part of it. Shamming a friendship long enough to make it seem believable, so that he would not be suspect at this time. I can believe Julian capable of that because I cannot believe him capable of strong emotional attachments."

I shook my head.

"I don't know," I said. "His friendship with Caine is something that occurred during my absence, so everyting I know concerning it is secondhand. Still, if Julian were looking for friendship in the form of another personality close to his own, I can see it. They were a lot alike. I tend to think it was real, because I don't think anybody is capable of deceiving someone about his friendship for years. Unless the other party is awfully stupid, which is something Caine was not. And—well, you say your reasoning was subjective, intuitive and biased. So is mine, on something like this. I just don't like to think anybody is such a miserable wretch that he would use his only friend that way. That's why I think there is something wrong with your list."

She sighed.

"For someone who has been around for as long as you have, Corwin, you say some silly things. Were you changed by your long stay in that funny little place? Years ago you would have seen the obvious, as I do."

"Perhaps I have changed, for such things no longer seem obvi-

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ous. Or could it be that you have changed, Fiona? A trifle more cynical that the little girl I once knew. It might not have been all that obvious to you, years ago."

She smiled softly.

"Never tell a woman she has changed, Corwin. Except for the better. You used to know that, too. Could it be that you are really only one of Corwin's shadows, sent back to suffer and intimidate here on his behalf? Is the real Corwin somewhere else, laughing at us all?"

"I am here, and I am not laughing," I said.

She laughed.

"Yes, that is it!" she said. "I have just decided that you are not yourself!

"Announcement, everybody!" she cried, springing to her feet. "I have just noticed that this is not really Corwin! It has to be one of his shadows! It has just announced a belief in friendship, dignity, nobility of spirit and those other things which figure preminently in popular romances! I am obviously onto something!"

The others stared at her. She laughed again, then sat down abruptly.

I heard Flora mutter "drunk" and return to her conversation with Deirdre. Random said, "Let's hear it for shadows" and turned back to a discussion with Benedict and Llewella.

"See?" she said.

"What?"

"You're insubstantial," she said, patting my knee. "And so am I, now that I think about it. It has been a bad day, Corwin."

"I know. I feel like hell, too. I thought I had such a fine idea, for getting Brand back. Not only that, it worked. A lot of good it did him."

"Don't overlook those bits of virtue you've acquired," she said. "You're not to blame for the way it turned out."

"Thanks."

"I believe that Julian might have had the right idea," she said. "I don't feel like staying awake any longer."

I rose with her, walked her to the door.

"I'm all right," she said. "Really."

"Sure?"

She nodded sharply.

"See you in the morning then."

"I hope so," she said. "Now you can talk about me."

She winked and went out.

I turned back, saw that Benedict and Llewella were approaching.

"Turning in?" I asked.

Benedict nodded.

"Might as well," Llewella said, and she kissed me lightly on the cheek.

"What was that for?"

"A number of things," she said. "Good night."

"Good night."

Random was crouched on the hearth, poking at the fire. Deirdre turned to him and said, "Don't throw on more wood just for us. Flora and I are going, too."

"Okay." He set the poker aside and rose. "Sleep well," he called after them.

Deirdre gave me a sleepy smile

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and Flora a nervous one. I added my good nights and watched them leave.

"Learn anything new and useful?" Random asked.

I shrugged.

"Did you?"

"Opinions, conjectures. No new facts," he said. "We were trying to decide who might be next on the list."

"And. . .?"

"Benedict thinks it's a tossup. You or him. Providing you are not behind it all, of course. He also thinks your buddy Ganelon ought to watch his step."

"Ganelon. . . Yes, that's a thought—and it should have been *mine. I think he is right* about the tossup, too. It may even be slightly weighted against him, since they know I'm alert because of the attempted frameup."

"I would say that all of us are now aware that Benedict is alert himself. He managed to mention his opinion to everyone. I believe that he would welcome an attempt."

I chuckled.

"That balances the coin again. I guess it *is* a tossup."

"He said that, too. Naturally, he knew I would tell you."

"Naturally. I wish he would start talking to me again. Well. . . Not much I can do about it now," I said. "The hell with everything. I'm going to bed."

He nodded.

"Look under it first."

We left the room, headed up the hall.

"Corwin, I wish you'd had the foresight to bring some coffee back with you, along with the guns," he said. "I could use a cup."

"Doesn't it keep you awake?"

"No. I like a couple cups in the evening."

"I miss it mornings. We'll have to import some when this mess is all settled."

"Small comfort, but a good idea. —What got into Fi, anyhow?"

"She thinks Julian is our man."

"She may be right."

"What about Caine?"

"Supposing it was not a single individual," he said, as we mounted the stair. "Say it was *two*, like *Julian and* Caine. They finally had a falling out, Caine lost, Julian disposed of him and used the death to weaken your position as well. Former friends make the worst enemies."

"It's no use," I said. "I get dizzy when I start sorting the possibilities. We are either going to have to wait for something more to happen, or make something happen. Probably the latter. But not tonight—"

"Hey! Wait up!"

"Sorry." I paused at the landing. "Don't know what got into me. Finishing spurt, I guess."

"Nervous energy," he said, coming abreast of me once more. We continued on up, and I made an effort to match his pace, fighting down a desire to hurry.

"Well, sleep well," he said, finally.

"Good night, Random."

He continued on up the stair and I headed off along the cor-

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ridor toward my quarters. I was feeling jittery by then, which must be why I dropped my key.

I reached and plucked it out of the air before it had fallen very far. Simultaneously, I was struck by the impression that its motion was somewhat slower than it should have been. I inserted it in the lock and turned it.

The room was dark, but I decided against getting a candle or an oil lamp going. I had gotten used to the dark a long time ago. I locked and bolted the door. My eyes were already half-adjusted to the gloom, from the dim hallway. I turned. There was some starlight leaking in about the drapes, too. I crossed the room, unfastening my collar.

He was waiting in my bed chamber, to the left of the entrance. He was perfectly positioned and he did nothing to give himself away. I walked right into it. He had the ideal station, he held the dagger ready, he had the element of total surprise going for him. By rights I should have died—not in my bed, but just there at its foot.

I caught a glimpse of the movement, realized the presence and its significance as I stepped over the threshold.

I knew that it was too late to avoid the thrust even as I raised my arm to try to block it. But one peculiarity struck me before the blade itself did: my assailant seemed to be moving too slowly. Quick, with all the tension of his wait behind it, that is how it should have been. I should never have known it was occurring until after the act, if then. I should not have had time to turn partway and swing my arm as far as I did. A ruddy haze filled my vision and I felt my forearm strike the side of the outflung arm at about the same moment as the steel touched my belly and bit. Within the redness there seemed a faint tracing of that cosmic version of the Pattern I had followed earlier in the day. As I doubled and fell, unable to think but still for a moment conscious, it came clearer, came nearer, the design. I wanted to flee, but horse my body stumbled. I was thrown.

VIII.

Out of every life a little blood must spill. Unfortunately, it was my turn again, and it felt like more than a little. I was lying, doubled up, on my right side, both arms clutching at my middle. I was wet, and every now and then something trickled along the creases of my belly. Front, lower left, just above the beltline, I felt like a casually opened envelope. These were my first sensations as consciousness came round again. And my first thought was, "What is he waiting for?" Obviously, the *coup de grace* had been withheld. Why?

I opened my eyes. They had taken advantage of whatever time had elapsed to adjust themselves to the darkness. I turned my head. I did not see anyone else in the room with me. But something peculiar had occurred and I could not quite place it. I closed my eyes and let my head fall back to the mattress once more.

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Something was wrong, yet at the same time right. . .

The mattress. . . Yes, I was lying on my bed. I doubted my ability to have gotten there unassisted. But it would be absurd to knife me and then help me to bed—

My bed. . . It was my bed, yet it was not.

I squeezed my eyes tight. I gritted my teeth. I did not understand. I knew that my thinking could not be normal there on the fringes of shock, my blood pooling in my guts and then leaking out. I tried to force myself to think clearly. It was not easy.

My bed. Before you are fully aware of anything else, you are aware whether or not you are awakening on your own bed. And I was, but—

I fought down an enormous impulse to sneeze, because I felt it would tear me apart. I compressed my nostrils and breathed in short gasps through my mouth. The taste, smell and feel of dust was all about me.

The nasal assault subsided and I opened my eyes. I knew then where I was. I did not understand the why and how of it, but I had come once more to a place I had never expected to see again.

I lowered my right hand, used it to raise myself.

It was my bedroom in my house. The old one. The place which had been mine back when I was Carl Corey. I had been returned to Shadow, to that world where I had spent the years of my exile. The room was heavy with dust. The bed had not been made up since the last time I had slept in it, over half a decade before. I knew the state of the house fully, having looked in on it only a few weeks earlier.

I pushed myself further, managed to slide my feet out over the edge of the bed and down. Then I doubled up again and sat there. It was bad.

While I felt temporarily safe from further assault, I knew that I required more than safety just then. I had to have help, and I was in no position to help myself. I was not even certain how much longer I might remain conscious. So I had to get down and get out. The phone would be dead, the nearest house was not too close by. I would have to get down to the road, at least. I reflected grimly that one of my reasons for locating where I had was that it was not a well-traveled road. I enjoy my solitude, at least some of the time.

With my right hand, I drew up the nearest pillow and slipped off its case. I turned it inside out, tried to fold it, gave up, wadded it, slipped it beneath my shirt and pressed it against my wound. Then I sat there, just holding it in place. It had been a major exertion and I found it painful to take too deep a breath.

After a time, though, I drew the second pillow to me, held it across my knees and let it slip out of its case. I wanted the pillowslip to wave at a passing motorist, for my garments, as usual, were dark. Before I could draw it through my belt though, I was confounded by the behavior of the pillow itself. It

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had not yet reached the floor. I had released it, nothing was supporting it and it *was* moving. But it was moving quite slowly, descending with a dream-like deliberation.

I thought of the fall of the key, as I had dropped it outside my room. I thought of my unintended quickness on mounting the stair with Random. I thought of Fiona's words, and of the Jewel of Judgment which still hung about my neck, now pulsating in time with the throbbing of my side. It might have saved my life, at least for the moment; yes, it probably had, if Fiona's notions were correct. It had probably given me a moment or so more than would otherwise have been my due when the assailant struck, letting me turn, letting me swing my arm. It might, somehow, even have been responsible for my sudden transportation. But I would have to think about such things at another time, should I succeed in maintaining a meaningful relationship with the future. For now, the jewel had to go—in case Fiona's fears concerning it were also correct—and I had to get moving.

I turked away the second pillow cover, then tried to stand, holding onto the footboard. No good! Dizziness and too much pain. I lowered myself to the floor, afraid of passing out on the way down. I made it. I rested. Then I began to move, a slow crawl.

The front door, as I recalled, was now nailed shut. All right. Out the back, then.

I made it to the bedroom door and halted, leaning against its frame. As I rested there, I removed the Jewel of Judgment from my neck and wrapped its chain about my wrist. I had to cache it someplace, and the safe in my study was too far out of the way. Besides, I believed that I was leaving a trail of blood. Anyone finding and following it might well be curious enough to investigate and spring the small thing. And I lacked the time and the energy. . .

I made my way out, around and through. I had to rise up and exert myself to get the back door open. I made the mistake of not resting first.

When I regained consciousness, I was lying across the threshold. The night was raw and clouds filled much of the sky. A mean wind rattled branches above the patio. I felt several drops of moisture on the back of my outflung hand.

I pushed up and crawled out. The snow was about two inches deep. The icy air helped to revive me. With something near panic, I realized just how foggy my mind had been during much of my course from the bedroom. It was possible that I might go under at any time.

I started immediately for the far corner of the house, deviating only to reach the compost heap, tear my way into it, drop the jewel and reposition the clump of dead grasses I had broken loose. I brushed snow over it and continued on.

Once I made it around the corner, I was shielded from the wind and headed down a slight

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incline. I reached the front of the house and rested once more. A car had just passed and I watched its tail lights dwindle. It was the only vehicle in sight.

Icy crystals stung my face as I moved again. My knees were wet and burning cold. The front yard sloped, gently at first, then dropped sharply toward the road. There was a dip about a hundred yards to the right, where motorists generally hit their brakes. It seemed this might give me a few moments more in the headlights of anyone coming from that direction—one of those small assurances the mind always seeks when things get serious, an aspirin for the emotions. With three rest stops, I made it down to the roadside, then over to the big rock that bore my house number. I sat on it and leaned back against the icy embankment. I hauled out the second pillow case and draped it across my knees.

I waited. I knew that my mind was fuzzy. I believe that I drifted into and out of consciousness a number of times. Whenever I caught myself at it, I attempted to impose some version of order on my thoughts, to assess what had happened in the light of everything else that had just happened, to seek other safety measures. The former effort proved too much, however. It was simply too difficult to think beyond the level of responding to circumstance. With a sort of numb enlightenment, though, it occurred to me that I still had my Trumps. I could contact someone in Amber, have him transport me back.

But who? I was not so far gone that I failed to realize I might be contacting the one responsible for my condition. Would it be better to gamble that way, or to take my chances here? Still, Random or Gérard—

I thought that I heard a car. Faint, distant. . . The wind and my pulsebeat were competing with perception, though. I turned my head. I concentrated.

There. . . Again. Yes. It was an engine. I got ready to wave the cloth.

Even then, my mind kept straying. And one thought that flitted through was that I might already be unable to muster sufficient concentration to manipulate the Trumps.

The sound grew louder. I raised the cloth. Moments later, the farthest visible point along the road to my right was touched with light. Shortly after, I saw the car at the top of the rise. I lost sight of it once more as it descended the hill. Then it climbed again and came on, snowflakes flashing through its headbeams.

I began waving as it approached the dip. The lights caught me as it came up out of it, and the driver could not have missed seeing me. He went by though, a man in a late model sedan, a woman in the passenger seat. The woman turned and looked at me, but the driver did not even slow down.

. . . .A couple minutes later another car came by, a bit older, a woman driving, no visible passengers. It did slow down, but only for a moment. She must not

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have liked my looks. She stepped on the gas and was gone.

I sagged back and rested. A prince of Amber can hardly invoke the brotherhood of man for purposes of moral condemnation. At least not with a straight face, and it hurt too much to laugh just then.

Without strength, concentration and some ability to move, my power over Shadow was useless. I would use it first, I decided, to get to some warm place. . . I wondered whether I could make it back up the hill, to the compost heap. I had not thought of trying to use the jewel to alter the weather. Probably, I was too weak for that too, though. Probably, the effort would kill me. . . Still. . .

I shook my head. I was drifting off, more than half a-dream. I had to stay awake. Was that another car? Maybe. I tried to raise the cloth and dropped it. When I leaned forward to retrieve it, I just had to rest my head on my knees for a moment. Deirdre. . . I would call my dear sister. If anyone would help me, Deirdre would. . . I would get out her Trump and call her. In a minute. If only she weren't my sister. . . I had to rest. I am a knave, not a fool. Perhaps, sometimes, when I rest, I am even sorry for things. Some things. If only it were warmer. . . But it wasn't too bad, bent over this way. . . Was that a car? I wanted to raise my head, but found that I could not. It would not make that much difference in being seen though, I decided.

I felt light on my eyelids and I heard the engine. . . Now it was neither advancing nor retreating. Just a steady cycling of growls. Then I heard a shout. Then the *click-pause-chunk* of a car door, opening and closing. I felt that I could open my eyes, but I did not want to. I was afraid that I would look only on the dark and empty road, that the sounds would resolve into pulsebeats and wind once more. It was better to keep what I had than to gamble—

"Hey! What's the matter? You hurt?"

Footsteps. . . This was real.

I opened my eyes. I forced msyelf up once again.

"Corey! My God! It's *you*!"

I forced a grin, cut my nod short of a topple.

"It's me, Bill. How've you been?"

"What happened?"

"I'm hurt," I said. "Maybe bad. Need a doctor."

"Can you walk if I help? Or should I carry you?"

"Let's try walking," I said.

He got me to my feet and I leaned on him. We started for his car. I only remember the first few steps.

When that low-swinging sweet chariot turned sour and swung high once more, I tried to raise my arm, realized that it was restrained, settled for a consideration of the tube affixed thereto and decided that I was going to live. I had sniffed hospital smells and consulted my internal clock. Having made it this far, I felt that I owed it to myself to continue. And I was warm, and as comfort-

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able as recent history allowed. That settled, I closed my eyes, lowered my head and went back to sleep.

Later, when I came around again, felt more fit and was spotted by a nurse, she told me that it was seven hours since I had been brought in and that a doctor would be by to talk with me shortly. She also got me a glass of water and told me that it had stopped snowing. She was curious as to what had happened to me.

I decided that it was time to start plotting my story. The simpler the better. All right. I was coming home after an extended stay abroad. I had hitchhiked out, gone on in and been attacked by some vandal or drifter I had surprised inside. I crawled back out and sought help. Finis.

When I told it to the doctor I could not tell at first whether he believed me. He was a heavy man whose face had sagged and set long ago. His name was Bailey, Morris Bailey, and he nodded as I spoke and then asked me, "Did you get a look at the fellow?"

I shook my head.

"It was dark," I said.

"Did he rob you, too?"

"I don't know."

"Were you carrying a wallet?"

I decided I had better say yes to that one.

"Well, you don't have one now, so he must have taken it."

"Must have," I agreed.

"Do you remember me at all?"

"Can't say that I do. Should I?"

"You seemed vaguely familiar to me when they brought you in. That was all, at first. . ."

"And. . .?" I asked.

"What sort of garments were you wearing? They seemed something like a uniform."

"Latest thing, Over There, these days. You were saying that I looked familiar?"

"Yes," he agreed. "Where is Over There, anyway? Where did you come from? Where have you been?"

"I travel a lot," I said. "You were going to tell me something a moment ago."

"Yes," he said. "We are a small clinic, and some time ago a fast-talking salesman persuaded the directors to invest in a computerized medical records system. If the area had developed more and we had expanded a lot, it might have been worthwhile. Neither of these things happened, though, and it is an expensive item. It even encouraged a certain laziness among the clerical help. Old files just don't get purged the way they used to, even for the emergency room. Space there for a lot of useless backlog. So, when Mister Roth gave me your name and I ran a routine check on you, I found something and I realized why you looked familiar. I had been working the emergency room that night too, around seven years ago, when you had your auto accident. I remembered working on you then—and how I thought you weren't going to make it. You surprised me though, and you still do. I can't even find the scars that *should* be there. You did a nice job of healing up."

"Thanks. A tribute to the

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physician, I'd say."

"May I have your age, for the record?"

"Thirty-six," I said. That's always safe.

He jotted it somewhere in the folder he held across his knees.

"You know, I would have sowrn—once I got to checking you over and remembering—that that's about the age you looked the last time I saw you."

"Clean living."

"Do you know about your blood type?"

"It's an exotic. But you can treat it as an AB Positive for all practical purposes. I can take anything, but don't give mine to anybody else."

He nodded.

"The nature of your mishap is going to require a police report, you know."

"I had guessed that."

"Just thought you might want to be thinking about it."

"Thanks," I said. "So you were on duty that night, and you patched me up. . . ? Interesting. What else do you recall about it?"

"What do you mean?"

"The circumstances under which I was brought in that time. My own memory is a blank from right before the accident until some time after I had been trans ferred up to the other place—Greenwood. Do you recall how I arrived?"

He frowned, just when I had decided he had one face for all occasions.

"We sent an ambulance," he said.

"In response to what? Who reported the accident? How?"

"I see what you mean," he said. "It was the State Patrol that called for the ambulance. As I recollect, someone had seen the accident and phoned their headquarters. They then radioed a car in the vicinity. It went to the lake, verified the report, gave you first aid and called for the ambulance. And that was it."

"Any record of who called in the report in the first place?"

He shrugged.

"That's not the sort of thing we keep track of," he said. "Didn't your insurance company investigate? Wasn't there a claim? They could probably—"

"I had to leave the country right after I recovered," I said. "I never pursued the matter. I suppose there would have been a police report, though. . ."

"Surely. But I have no idea how long they keep them around—" He chuckled. "Unless, of course, that same salesman got to them, too. —It is rather late to be talking about that though, isn't it? It seems to me there is a statute of limitations on things of that sort. Your friend Roth will tell you for sure—"

"It isn't a claim that I have in mind," I said. "Just a desire to know what really happened. I have wondered about it on and off for a number of years now. You see, I have this touch of retrograde amnesia going—"

"Have you ever talked it over with a psychiatrist?" he said, and there was something about the way he said it that I did not like. Came one of those little flashes of

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insight then: Could Flora have managed to get me certified insane before my transfer to Greenwood? Was that on my record here? And was I still on escape status from that place? A lot of time had passed and I knew nothing of the legalities involved. If this was indeed the case, however, I imagined they would have no way of knowing whether I had been certified sane again in some other jurisdiction. Prudence, I guess it was, cautioned me to lean forward and glance at the doctor's wrist. I seemed possessed of a subliminal memory that he had consulted a calendar watch when taking my pulse. Yes, he had. I squinted. All right. Day & month: November 28. I did a quick calculation with my two-and-a-half to one conversion and had the year. It *was* seven, as he had indicated.

"No, I haven't," I said. "I just assumed it was organic rather than functional and wrote the time off as a loss."

"I see," he said. "You use such phrases rather glibly. People who've been in therapy sometimes do that."

"I know," I said, "I've read a lot about it."

He sighed. He stood.

"Look," he said. "I am going to call Mister Roth and let him know you are awake. It is probably best."

"What do you mean by that?"

"I mean that with your friend being an attorney, there might be things you want to discuss with him before you talk to the police."

He opened the folder wherein he had somewhere jotted my age, raised his pen, furrowed his brow and said, "What's the date, anyway?"

I wanted my Trumps. I imagined my belongings would be in the drawer of the bedside table, but getting at it involved too much twisting and I did not want to put the strain on my sutures. It was not all that urgent, though. Eight hours' sleep in Amber would come to around twenty hours here, so everyone should still have been respectably retired back home. I wanted to get hold of Random though, to come up with some sort of cover story for my not being there in the morning. Later.

I did not want to look suspicious at a time like this. Also, I wanted to know immediately whatever Brand had to say. I wanted to be in a position to act on it. I did a quick bit of mental juggling. If I could do the worst of my recovering here in Shadow it would mean less wasted time for me back in Amber. I would have to budget my time carefully and avoid complications on this end. I hoped that Bill would arrive soon. I was anxious to know what the picture was in this place.

Bill was a native of the area, had gone to school in Buffalo, come back, married, joined the family firm and that was that. He had known me as a retired Army officer who sometimes traveled on vague business. We both belonged to the country club, which was where I had met him. I had known him for over a year without our exchanging more than a

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few words. Then one evening I happened to be next to him in the bar and it had somehow come out that he was hot on military history, particularly the Napoleonic Wars. The next thing we knew, they were closing the place up around us. We were close friends from then on, right up until the time of my difficulties. I had occasionally wondered about him since. In fact, the only thing that had prevented me from seeing him the last time I had passed through was that he would doubtless have had all sorts of questions as to what had become of me, and I had had too many things on my mind to deal with them all that gracefully and still enjoy myself. I had even thought once or twice of coming back and seeing him if I could, when everything was finally settled in Amber. Next to the fact that this was not the case, I regretted not being able to meet him in the club lounge.

He arrived within the hour, short, heavy, ruddy, a bit grayer on the sides, grinning, nodding. I had propped myself up by then, already tried a few deep breaths and decided they were premature. He clasped my hand and took the bedside chair. He had his briefcase with him.

"You scared the hell out of me last night, Carl. Thought I was seeing a ghost," he said.

I nodded.

"A bit later, and I might have been one," I said. "Thanks. How have you been?"

Bill sighed.

"Busy. You know. The same old stuff, only more of it."

"And Alice?"

"She's fine. And we've got two new grandsons—Bill Jr.'s—twins. Wait a minute."

He fished out his wallet and located a photo.

"Here."

I studied it, noted the family resemblances.

"Hard to believe," I said.

"You don't look much worse for the years."

I chuckled and patted my abdomen.

"Subtracting that, I mean," he said. "Where have you been?"

"God! Where haven't I been!" I said. "So many places I've lost count."

He remained expressionless, caught my eyes and stared.

"Carl, what kind of trouble are you in?" he asked.

I smiled.

"If you mean am I in trouble with the law, the answer is no. My troubles actually involve another country, and I am going to have to go back there shortly."

His face relaxed again, and there was a small glint behind his bifocals.

"Are you some sort of military adviser in that place?"

I nodded.

"Can you tell me where?"

I shook my head.

"Sorry."

"That I can sort of understand," he said. "Doctor Roth told me what you said had happened last night. Off the record now, was it connected with whatever you have been doing?"

I nodded again.

"That makes things a little

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clearer," he said. "Not much, but enough. I won't even ask you which agency, or even if there is one. I have always known you to be a gentleman, and a rational one at that. That was why I grew curious at the time of your disappearance and did some investigating. I felt a bit officious and self-conscious about it. But your civil status was quite puzzling, and I wanted to know what had happened. Mainly, because I was concerned about you. I hope that doesn't disturb you?"

"Disturb me?" I said. "There aren't that many people who care what happens to me. I'm grateful. Also, curious what you discovered. I never had the time to look into it, you know, to straighten things out. How about telling me what you learned?"

He opened the briefcase and withdrew a manila folder. Spreading it across his knees, he shuffled out several sheets of yellow paper covered with neat handwriting. Raising the first of these, he regarded it a moment, then said, "After you escaped from the hospital in Albany and had your accident, Brandon apparently dropped out of the picture and—"

"Stop!" I said, raising my hand, trying to sit up.

"What?" he asked.

"You have the order wrong, also the place," I said. "First came the accident, and Greenwood is not in Albany."

"I know," he said. "I was referring to the Porter Sanitarium, where you spent two days and then escaped. You had had your accident that same day, and you were brought here as a result of it. Then your sister Evelyn entered the picture. She had you transferred to Greenwood, where you spent a couple weeks before departing on your own motion once again. Right?"

"Partly," I said. "Namely, the last part. As I was telling the doctor earlier, my memory is shot for a couple days prior to the accident. This business about a place in Albany *does* sort of seem to ring a bell, but only very faintly. Do you have more on it?"

"Oh yes," he said. "It may even have something to do with the state of your memory. You were committed on a bum order—"

"By whom?"

He shook the paper and peered.

" 'Brother, Brandon Corey; attendant physician, Hillary B. Rand, psychiatrist'," he read. "Hear any more bells?"

"Quite possibly," I said. "Go ahead."

"Well, an order got signed on that basis," he said. "You were duly certified, taken into custody and transported. Then, concerning your memory. . . ."

"Yes?"

"I don't know that much about the practice and its effects on the memory, but you were subjected to electroshock therapy while you were at Porter. Then, as I said, the record indicates that you escaped after the second day. You apparently recovered your car from some unspecified locale and were heading back this way when you had the accident."

"That seems right," I said. "It

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does." For a moment, when he had begun talking, I had had a wild vision of having been returned to the wrong shadow—one where everything was similar, but not congruent. Now, though, I did not believe this to be the case. I was responding to this story on some level.

"Now, about that order," he said. "It was based on false evidence, but there was no way of the court's knowing it at the time. The real Doctor Rand was in England when everything happened, and when I contacted him later he had never heard of you. His office had been broken into while he was away, though. Also, peculiarly, his middle initial is not B. He had never heard of Brandon Corey either."

"What did become of Brandon?"

"He simply vanished. Several attempts were made to contact him at the time of your escape from Porter, but he could not be found. Then you had the accident, were brought here and treated. At that time, a woman named Evelyn Flaumel, who represented herself as your sister, contacted this place, told them you had been probated and that the family wanted you transferred to Greenwood. In the absence of Brandon, who had been appointed your guardian, her instructions were followed, as the only available next of kin. That was how it came about that you were sent to the other place. You escaped again, a couple weeks later, and that is where my chronology ends."

"then what is my legal status right now?" I asked.

"Oh, you've been made whole," he said. "Doctor Rand went down after I talked with him and gave the court an affidavit reciting these facts. The order was vacated."

"Then why is the doctor here acting as if I might be a psycho case?"

"Oh my! That *is* a thought. It hadn't occurred to me. All their records would show here is that at one time you apparently were. I had better see him on the way out. I have a copy of the journal entry in here, too. I can show it to him."

"How long was it after I left Greenwood that things were set right with the court?"

"The following month," he said. "It was several weeks before I could bring myself to get nosy."

"You couldn't know how happy I am that you did," I said. "And you have given me several pieces of information I think are going to prove extremely important."

"It is nice to be able to help a friend sometime," he said, closing the folder and replacing it in his briefcase. "One thing. . . When this is all over—whatever you are doing—if you are permitted to talk about it, I would like to hear the story."

"I can't promise. . ." I said.

"I know. Just thought I'd mention it. —By the way, what do you want to do about the house?"

"Mine? Do I still hold title to it?"

"Yes, but it will probably be

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sold this year for back taxes if you don't do anything about it."

"I'm surprised that hasn't already happened."

"You gave the bank power of attorney for paying your bills."

"I never thought of that. I'd just set it up for utilities and my charge accounts. Stuff like that."

"Well, the account is nearly empty now," he said. "I was talking to McNally over there the other day. That means the house will go next year if you don't do anything."

"I've got no use for it now," I said. "They can do whatever they want with it."

"Then you might as well sell it and realize what you can."

"I won't be around that long."

"I could handle it for you. Send the money wherever you want."

"All right," I said. "I'll sign anything necessary. Pay my hospital bill out of it and keep the rest."

"I couldn't do that."

I shrugged.

"Do whatever you think best, but be sure and take a good fee."

"I'll put the balance in your account."

"All right. Thanks. —By the way, before I forget, would you look in the drawer of that table and see if there is a deck of cards there? I can't reach it yet, and I'll be wanting them later."

"Surely."

He reached over, opened it.

"A big brown envelope," he said. "Kind of bulgy. They probably put whatever was in your pockets in it."

"Open it."

"Yes, here's a pack of cards," he said, reaching inside. "Say! That's a beautiful case! May I?"

"I—" What could I say?

He slipped the case.

"Lovely. . ." he murmurred. "Some kind of Tarots. . . Are they antique?"

"Yes."

"Cold as ice. . . I never saw anything like these. . . Say, that's you! Dressed up like some kind of knight! —What's their purpose?"

"A very complicated game," I said.

"How could that be you if they are antique?"

"I didn't say it was me. You did."

"Yes, so I did. Ancestor?"

"Sort of."

"Now that's a good looking gal! —But so is the redhead. . ."

"I think. . ."

He squared the deck and replaced it in the case. He passed it to me.

"Nice unicorn, too," he added. "I shouldn't have looked at them, should I?"

"That's all right."

He sighed and leaned back in the chair, clasping his hands behind his head.

"I couldn't help it," he said. "It is just that there is something very strange about you, Carl, beyond any hush-hush work you may be doing—and mysteries intrigue me. I've never been this close to a real puzzler before."

"Because you just slipped yourself a cold deck of Tarots?" I asked.

"No, that just adds atmosphere," he said. "While what you

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have been doing all these years is admittedly none of my business, there is one recent incident I am unable to comprehend."

"What is that?"

"After I brought you here and took Alice home last night, I went back to your place, hoping to get some sort of idea as to what had happened. The snow had let up by then, though it started in again later, and your track was still clearly visible, going around the house and down the front yard. . ."

I nodded.

"But there were no tracks going in—nothing to indicate your arrival. And for that matter, there were *no other tracks departing* —nothing to show the flight of your assailant."

I chuckled.

"You think the wound was self-inflicted?"

"No, of course not. There wasn't even a weapon in sight. I followed the bloodstains back to the bedroom, to your bed. I had only my flashlight to see by, of course, but what I saw gave me an eerie feeling. It seemed as if you had just suddenly appeared there on the bed, bleeding, and then gotten up and made your way out."

"Impossible, of course."

"Why no tracks, though?"

"The wind must have blown snow over them."

"And not the others?" He shook his head. "No, I don't think so. I just want to go on the record as interested in the answer to that one too, if you ever do want to tell me about things."

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"I will remember," I said.

"Yes," he said. "But I wonder. . . I've a peculiar feeling that I may never see you again. It is as if I were one of those minor characters in a melodrama who get shuffled offstage without ever learning how things turn out."

"I can appreciate the feeling," I said. "My own role sometimes makes me want to strangle the author. But look at it this way: inside stories seldom live up to one's expectations. Usually they are grubby little things, reducing down to the basest of motives when all is known. Conjectures and illusions are often the better possessions."

He smiled.

"You talk the same as always," he said, "yet I have known occasions when you have been tempted to virtue. Several of them. . ."

"How did we get from the footprints to me?" I said. "I was about to tell you that I suddenly recalled having approached the house by exactly the same route

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as I left it. My departure obviously obliterated the signs of my arrival."

"Not bad," he said. "And your attacker followed the same route?"

"Must have."

"Pretty good," he acknowledged. "You know how to raise a reasonable doubt. But I still feel that the preponderance of evidence indicates the weird."

"Weird? No. Peculiar, perhaps. A matter of interpretation."

"Or semantics. Have you read the police report on your accident?"

"No. Have you?"

"Uh-huh. What if *it* was more than peculiar? Then will you grant me my word, as I used it: 'weird'?"

"Very well."

". . . .And answer one question?"

"I don't know. . ."

"A simple yes-or-no question. That's all."

"Okay, it's a deal. What did it say?"

"It said that they received report of the accident and a patrol car proceeded to the scene. There they encountered a strangely garbed man in the process of giving you first aid. He stated that he had pulled you from the wrecked car in the lake. This seemed believable in that he was also soaking wet. Average height, light build, red hair. He had on a green outfit that one of the officers said looked like something out of a Robin Hood movie. He refused to identify himself, to accompany them or to give a statement of any sort. When they insisted that he do so, he whistled and a white horse came trotting up. He leaped onto its back and rode off. He was not seen again."

I laughed. It hurt, but I couldn't help it.

"I'll be damned!" I said. "Things are starting to make sense."

Bill just stared at me for a moment. Then, "Really?" he said.

"Yes, I think so. It may well have been worth getting stabbed and coming back for what I learned today."

"You put the two in peculiar order," he said, massaging his chin.

"Yes, I do. But I am beginning to see some order where I had seen nothing before. This one may have been worth the price of admission, all unintended."

"All because of a guy on a white horse?"

"Partly, partly. . . Bill, I am going to be leaving here soon—"

"You are not going anywhere for awhile."

"Just the same—those papers you mentioned. . . I think I had better get them signed today."

"All right. I'll get them over this afternoon. But I don't want you doing anything foolish."

"I grow more cautious by the moment," I said, "believe me."

"I hope so," he said, snapping his briefcase shut and rising. "Well, get your rest. I'll clear things up with the doctor and have those papers sent over today."

"Thanks again."

I shook his hand.

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"By the way," he said, "you did agree to answer a question."

"I did, didn't I? What is it?"

"Are you human?" he asked, still gripping my hand, no special expression on his face.

I started in on a grin, then threw it away.

"I don't know. I— I like to think so. But I don't really— Of course I am! That's a silly. . . Oh hell! You really mean it, don't you? And I said I'd be honest. . ." I chewed my lip and thought for a moment. Then, "I don't think so," I said.

"Neither do I," he said, and he smiled. "It doesn't make any real difference to me, but I thought it might to you—to know that someone knows you are different and doesn't care."

"I'll remember that, too," I said.

"Well. . . See you around."

"Right."

IX.

It was just after the State Patrolman left. . . Late afternoon, I was lying there feeling better, and feeling better that I felt better. Lying there, reflecting on the hazards involved in living in Amber. Brand and I were both laid up by means of the family's favorite weapon. I wondered who had gotten it worse? Probably he had. It might have reached his kidney, and he was in poor condition to begin with.

I had stumbled across the room and back again twice before Bill's clerk came over with the papers for me to sign. It was necessary that I know my limits. It always is. Since I tended to heal several times faster than those about me in that shadow, I felt that I ought to be able to stand and walk some, to perform in the same fashion as one of these after, say, a day and a half, maybe two. I established that I could. It did hurt, and I was dizzy the first time, less dizzy the second. That was something, anyway. So I lay there feeling better.

I had planned the Trumps dozens of times, dealth private solitaires, read ambiguous fortunes among familiar faces. And each time I had restrained myself, suppressing my desire to contact Random, to tell him what had happened, to inquire after new developments. Later, I kept telling myself. Each additional hour they sleep is two and a half for you, here. Each two and a half for you, here, is the equivalent of seven or eight for some lesser mortal, here. Abide. Think. Regenrate.

And so it came to pass that a little after dinnertime, just as the sky was darkening again, I was beaten to the punch. I had already told a well-starched young member of the State Patrol everything that I was going to tell him. I have no idea whether he believed me, but he was polite and he did not stay long. In fact, it was only moments after he left that things began to happen.

Lying there, feeling better, I was waiting for Doctor Bailey to stop by and check whether I was still oriented. Lying there, assessing all of the things Bill had told

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me, trying to fit them together with other things that I knew or had guessed at. . .

Contact! I had been anticipated. Someone in Amber was an early riser.

"Corwin!"

It was Random, agitated.

"Corwin! Get up! Open the door!Brand's come around, and he's asking for you."

"Have you been pounding on that door, trying to get me up?"

"That's reight."

"Are you alone?"

"Yes."

"Good. I am not inside. You have reached me in Shadow."

"I do not understand."

"Neither do I. I am hurt, but I will live. I will give you the story later. Tell me about Brand."

"He woke up just a little while ago. Told Gérard he had to talk to you right away. Gérard rang up a servant, sent him to your room. When he couldn't rouse you, he came to me. I just sent him back to tell Gérard I'd be bringing you along shortly."

"I see," I said, stretching slowly and sitting up. "Get in some place where you can't be seen, and I'll come through. I will need a robe or something. I am missing some clothes."

"It would probably be best if I went back to my rooms, then."

"Okay. Go ahead."

"A minute, then."

And silence.

I moved my legs, slowly. I sat on the edge of the bed. I gathered up my Trumps and replaced them in their case. I felt it important that I mask my injury back in Amber. Even in normal times one never advertises one's vulnerability.

I took a deep breath and stood, holding onto the bed frame. My practice had paid off. I breathed normally and relaxed my grip. Not bad, if I moved slowly, if I did not exert myself beyond the barest essentials required for appearances' sake. . . I might be able to carry it until my strength really returned.

Just then I heard a footfall, and a friendly nurse was frame in the doorway, crisp, symmetrical, differing from a snowflake mainly in that they are all of them alike.

"Get back in that bed, Mister Corey! You are not supposed to be up!"

"Madam," I said, "it is necessary that I be up. I have to go."

"You could have rung for a pan," she said, entering the room and advancing.

I gave my head a weary shake just as Random's presence reached me once more. I wondered how she would report this one—and if she would mention my prismatic afterimage as I trumped out. Another entry, I suppose, for the growing record of folklore I tend to leave behind.

"Think of it this way, my dear," I told her. "Ours has been a purely physical relatinship all along. There will be others. . . Many others. Adieu!"

I bowed and blew her a kiss as I stepped forward into Amber, leaving her to clutch at rainbows as I caught hold of Random's shoulder and staggered.

TO BE CONTINUED

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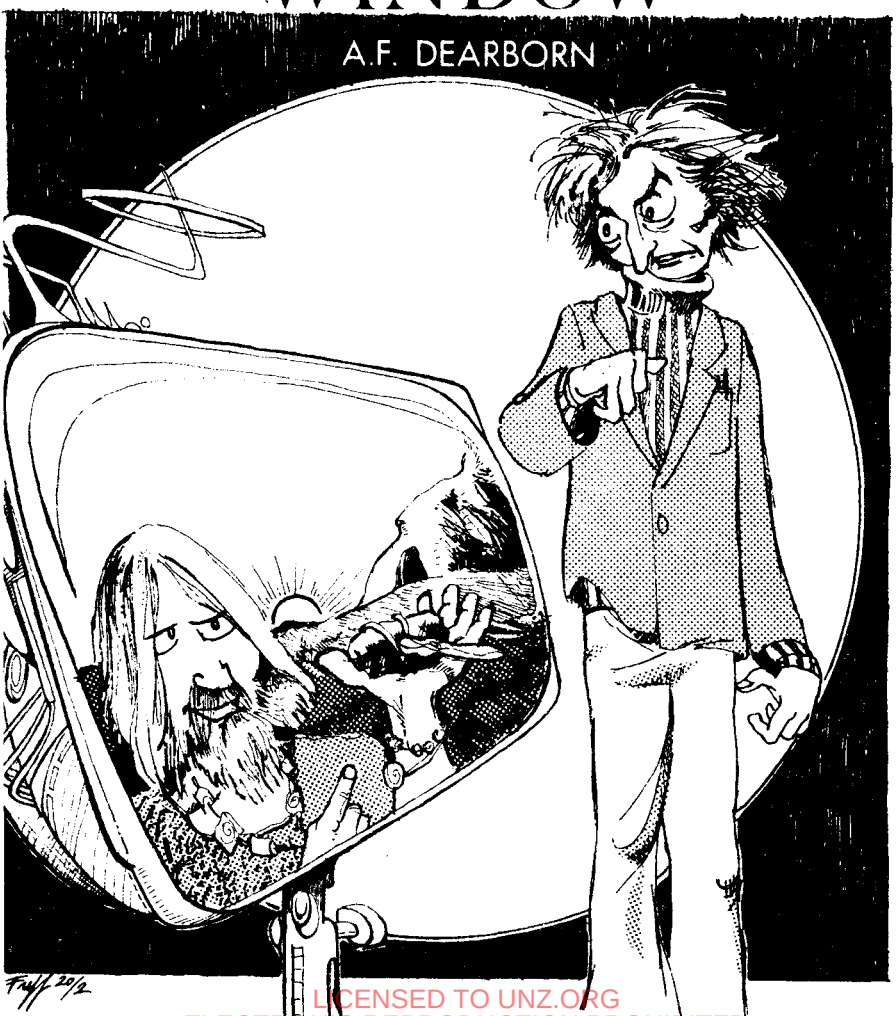
If you yearn for the sweet simplicity, the simple rusticity of our primeval ancestors, perhaps you too should take a look into—

THE WALDEN WINDOW

A.F. DEARBORN



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THEY CALLED THE paleolithic flint-chipper Henry, and his shapeless wife Gertrude. There were also five children of various sizes. That gave the expedition a lot to observe.

The three Windows that had been built were all clumsy devices that hadn't justified the money the government had plowed into them. Hopes of spying partriotically on the country's enemies, or privately on some well-chosen friends, or scientifically on the enigmas of history, were ended when it was mathematically demonstrated that each Window could show only a single segment of time and in each case the prehistoric past, and furthermore only the past of the particular spot in which the Window was located in the twentieth century. Improvement of the process seemed impossible, so the project was canceled and the Windows were turned over to the paleo-anthropologists, who alone found some reason to rejoice. No, not quite alone.

The present expedition consisted of six anthropologists, some graduate students as hewers of wood and drawers of water—and three professional movie cameramen. The costs of the expedition were being underwritten by a California film company, and this bothered Dr. Phillip Beldone, anthropologist-philologist.

"Do we have to let those people get their fingers in, mucking things up?"

It was pointed out to him that the film company *was* paying the bills and supplying the best cameraman in the business, that the company had nothing to say about the direction of the expedition, and that the serious researchers would get free processing for a year's worth of film.

"Yes," Beldone said, "but we don't have any control over the film they release. I'll bet it comes out as a skin flick."

Beldone had been first a poor boy on the streets of New York and then a student at Oxford. He'd picked up a number of Britishisms there that he dropped into his sentences for effect. He was a good fellow, but he had some odd ideas.

The Window was in the body of a Land Rover parked near the front of the cave. The millenia and their glaciers had laid down a lot of rock and earth, so the observers looked back through time from a perch twenty feet in the ancient air. Power was supplied through a line run up from the large generator down at the main camp by the river.

The anthropologists directing filming served four-hour shifts, the cameramen eight hours. Half an hour before he was due to relieve his predecessor, Beldone came trudging up the hill in the dark, under his arm his private

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notebook, thick and well cared for.

"Damn bloody television," he said. "You go watch it if you want."

A certain vice president had dropped in last week, just to see how his boys were doing. Brought with him and left behind with a grand gesture was a large television set. Color, yet. It worked fine even here, making the graduate students happy. But not everyone, not Beldone.

"What's the matter, Phil?"

"You'd think there'd be a place in the world where they couldn't shove remedies for blocked nasal passages at you. In color, yet."

"Oh, Phil. Ought to be good for a chapter in your magnum opus, there. So use it. Turn dross into gold; of the spirit, I mean."

"I intend to. I shall." Phil smiled just slightly, but he meant the words.

"Goodnight now." Smiling, the other scientist touched Phil's arm and went out, closing the door behind him. The cameraman, whose name was P. Waner Byrd—his father had been a baseball fanatic—was sitting back in a swivel chair with one eye on the Window. He was an older and more leisurely man than Beldone.

"Is anything happening?" Beldone asked.

"No, they're just sitting around eating." Byrd shrugged. "Nothing new."

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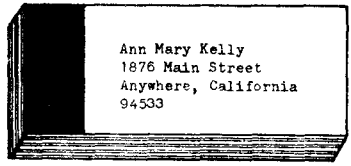

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The Window's viewing area measured somewhat larger than that of the television now displaying nasal congestion to the main camp. The Window could be swung around a pivot in the middle of the truck to provide a full three hundred sixty degree view. Through it now Henry and his family could be seen hunkered around the campfire eating. Henry was not clad in the bearskin strongman's outfit of the cartoons. He and all his clan wore tailored outfits of tanned hide that were functional if not pretty. From their communal bowl they ate meat brought home by Henry, stewed with roots collected by Gertrude and the children. In that longpast time there was

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still daylight as they ate.

Beldone pulled up his chair and sat down. When there was nothing doing in the Window he sometimes worked on his book ("A return on a higher plane to Thoreau, to the simple life", he could say in his own mind and one day in print) but now he just held the notebook in his lap.

Byrd asked: "What's *on* the TV tonight?".

"We were watching an opera, for a while." Some beautiful things would be lost to devotees of the Simple Life, because the price was too high. "It doesn't matter. They spoil everything. Art one moment and armpits the next."

"Oh, the commercials? They're not that bad," Byrd said. "Some of them are funny and the rest you can ignore."

"Maybe so," Beldone said. "I never could. I owned a telly once. And then one day I could feel the brainwashing beginning to get to me, and I broke the tube."

"You did?"

"Yes." Beldone smiled. "Just picked up a heavy glass ashtray and threw it. Made a most lovely noise."

Henry spoke to two of his middle-sized children and after a reluctant moment they picked down a hanging skin bag, stuck a stick through the thongs at its top so they could carry it between them, and set off downhill to the river, passing under the Window.

"Chores," said Byrd. "I wonder what they get for an allowance?"

"Did you get an allowance when you were a kid?"

"Yes."

"I never did. As a matter of fact, I turned over the money I made to my parents. You know, I'm growing to actually envy Henry and his family. The times are good. Life isn't too hard. And they don't have to put up with . . . ha. Television announcers."

Byrd smiled. "No Social Security."

"No taxes."

"Yes," Byrd said, "but I don't imagine Henry will live much past forty, will he?"

"No. You're right, of course. But his is the world as man evolved to fit it, and that's an advantage we'll never . . . "

Henry and Gert had jumped to their feet. A moment later the two children burst back on scene, wildly pointing and apparently yelling. They didn't have the water bag with them. Henry grabbed up a spear. His older son, who perhaps came to his shoulder, did the same, standing a step behind his father.

Beldone was up and watching intently. Byrd had switched on the camera. After the family had been caught in alert position, Gertrude shepherding the girls and the younger boy into the

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cave, Beldone said: "Let's swing around and see what's coming."

"Right."

Window and camrera swiveled to look down the hill. Climbing toward them were three people. Two were women, carrying packs. The third, a very large man, brought with him the filled waterbag, swinging it in one hand while he raised the other in a sign of peace. He had a couple of spears but they were slung on his back. He stumbled once, sloshing water on himself; the women with him tittered.

"Who's this?" Byrd wondered. "Relatives come to call?"

"We'll see." Beldone lifted the phone and informed base camp of the new arrivals, while Byrd brought the Window round again and focussed on the cave mouth. The newcomers came into sight just below and halted there. Henry came slowly forward, spear ready, and he and the new man talked. Now and then Gertrude acted as barber for Henry, so most of his face was usually exposed; the newcomer had hair down past his shoulders, and a great bushy beard. He towered over Henry, but benignly, After they had talked for a couple of minutes, Henry waved the three forward to the fire, and called Gertrude.

She came out of the cave, and with her oldest daughter bustled about adding reserve ingredients

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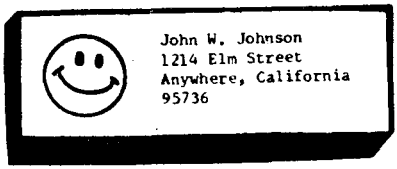

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to the stew. The older boy set down his spear and took the waterbag from the stranger's peaceful hand.

In the two months the expedition had been observing this family, only once before they had visitors. Byrd was filming every moment. Beldone went up into the cab to move the Land Rover slightly for a better angle.

Back in the rear, Beldone said: "Try for closeups of the new ones talking."

"That fella's beard'll cover a lot of lip movements."

"True, but the more talking mouths we can get on film the better our chance of cracking the language."

The new man had sat down crosslegged near the fire, facing the Window almost directly, to gobble some food. That chore out of the way, he belched, and wiped his mouth on his hand. Then, accommodating, he started talking. And he talked. He was a funny fellow, for Henry and Gertrude soon were laughing. And the shy children gradually crept closer, watching with bright intent eyes as the bearded man chattered, waved his hands, waited for laughter.

"I wonder who they are?" Byrd said. He was getting a lot of close-up footage.

Beldone just shook his head.

Bushy-Beard abruptly stopped his palaver and pulled from somewhere a small drum, which he tapped on while his two women got up to go capering around the fire. They hopped and jumped briskly in their shapeless leggings and jackets, shiny with grease. With their natural haircuts and gap-toothed smiles they did not seem particularly attractive to Beldone, but they did have a certain sense of rhythm. When the first viewers from the main camp arrived at the LAND Rover, out of breath, cursing someone's sprained ankle that had delayed them, Beldone just waved them inside while keeping a fascinated eye on the Window.

The dance was cut off suddenly. The big man set the drum aside and stood up. Looming over Henry, he began to talk again, and this time all the lip movements showed clearly through the facial brush.

"Phil, what—are you all right?"

Beldone raised an imperative hand.

Henry was standing now too, but retreating step by step. Spear not thought of, useless against this threat. The big man matched him step for step, advancing beard to beard, spraying words while with one hand he motioned his women forward with their packs.

"Phil! What is it?"

Phil was tearing pages from his notebook into little bits. His voice seemed changed. "What is it? It's the bloody commercial!" ★

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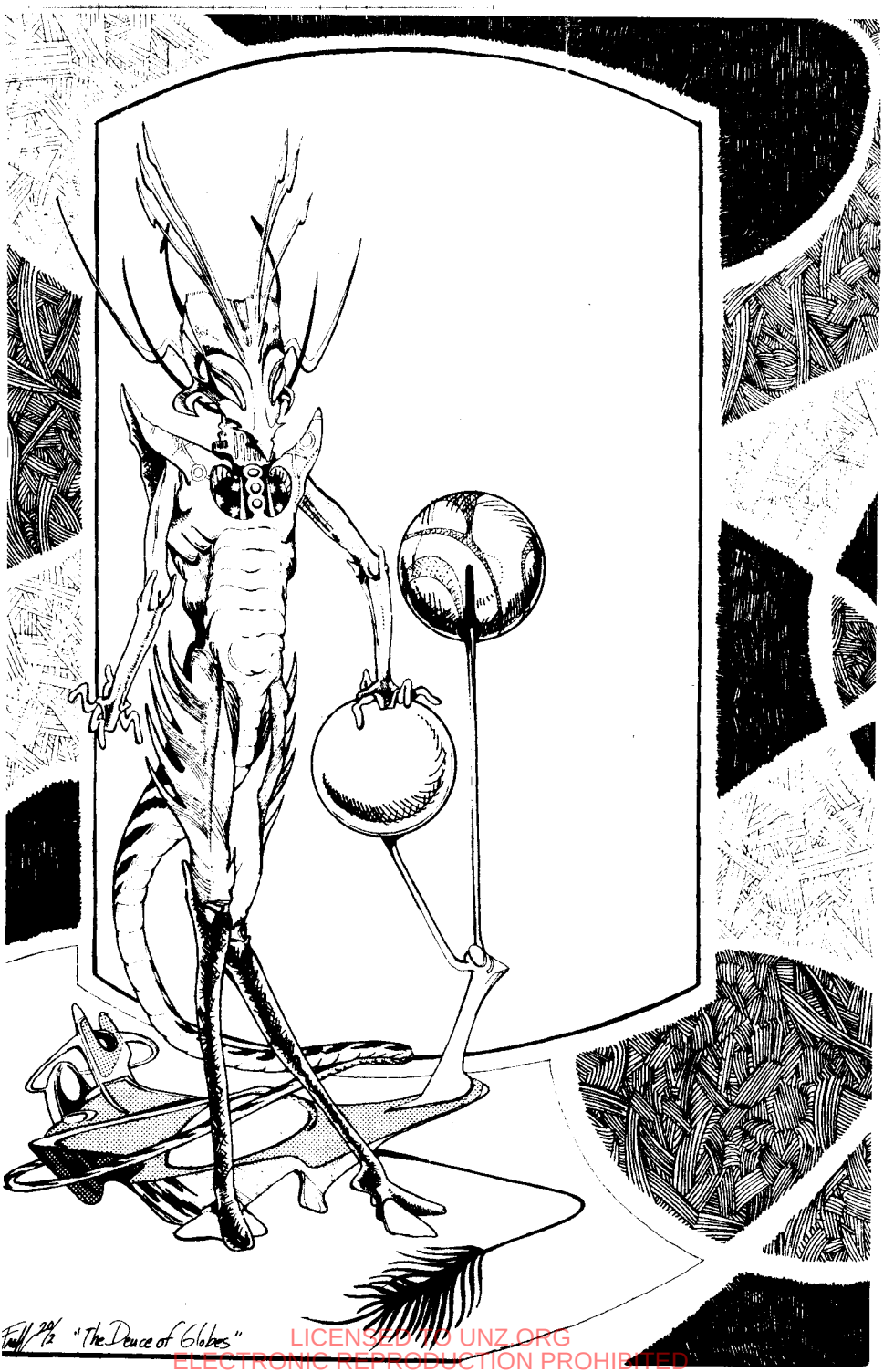

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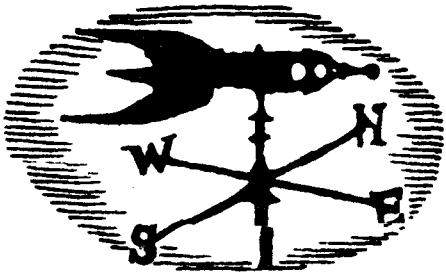

DIRECTIONS

Dear Mr. Baen,

J.A. Lawrence's November story, "The Persistence of Memory," deserves some comments on its biological heresies. First, there is the misconception that having the same genetic makeup produces a psychic link between the people involved. This is not the first clone story which has used this idea, which is provably false. The proof lies in the existence of many individuals of identical genetic makeup (identical twins) who show no such link. And the only difference between twins and clones is that the latter are an artificial creation of the former.

Another idea without biological basis is the supposed effect of celibacy on the psychic link of clones (or for that matter on any mental or physical process). Is there any physiological basis for such an effect? I cannot think of one. Maybe an endocrine imbalance could effect psychic contact but only temporarily. The real idea that Lawrence was probably driving at was that loss of celibacy means loss of some pristine and ideal state. I would add to these qualities intangible and immeasurable.

I enjoyed the story. It was only afterwards that I got to thinking about the biology.

"The Aerial Machine" by Herbie Brennan probably deserves classification with *Chariots of the Gods.* [*No, no! Anything but that!—Ed.*] We poor stupid earthlings are constantly suckered in by these alien ploys. If aliens are interested in us, when they want us to know about them, we will know. One can only hope (for how could one prepare) that conquest is not the rule on other worlds. While we wait, speculation is always a bit chilling.

Jerry Pournelle's holographic brain model sounds right. But if a small portion of the holograph contains the whole picture, why does increased brain capacity between species usually indicate increased intelligence? Surely no animal has a brain small enough to make the picture fuzzy. I would appreciate Jerry's answer to this question.

Congratulations on editing some fine magazines. Poul Anderson you have given us. Isaac Asimov you have given us. Dick Geis you have forced on us (Even though I enjoy every minute of his outrageous ideas). Here comes the suggestion. I want Heinlein. As publisher of the latest Hugo winning novel, *Rendevous With Rama*, you ought to be able to strike a deal with any author. Take heart! If you can get Clarke, you can get Heinlein. Say it over and over. Now do it. Please. [*OK—I'll ask him.—Ed*]

If is the best SF magazine being published today and I have tried them all. Keep up the good work and don't cut any more pages out of those magazines!

Brian Allman
4412 Bay Court Ave.
Tampa, Fla. 33611
Nov. 10, 1974

Perhaps the prior existence of a conscious entity produced by the same "genetic template" would create a uniquely personal "psychic-field effect" that would envelope–and thus conjoin–the clones in question? Also, Ms. Lawrence postulates identical memory-sets. . .

Dear Jim,

Thanks for sending me the August *Galaxy*. I've begun to read it, and I didn't find BEFORE THE REVOLUTION quite so bad—at the end she really had my sympathies for the old woman. I guess the only problem with this kind of story is that it's cumbersome to read quite so much interior monologue unless it's written with more zap. By contrast GARIGOLLI is terrific—just about the funniest thing I've read in a long time, a super-duper winner of a tale, extremely timely nowadays, especially from the point of view of a federal official trying to find ways to recycle PE.

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Poul Anderson's article hit me between the eyes, in a way, because just before I read his "cyclical theory," I finished a piece on this general subject—from a slightly different slant. My angle was that sf will become literature, *someday*. . .and when it does, it'll be a dead genre. Poul has obviously been dipping into Toynbee or Spengler or both—towering proponents of cyclical history, as evidenced both by KNIGHT OF GHOSTS AND SHADOWS and the sf article. I am also very interested in that concept. It's a damn useful perspective for the futuristically oriented author.

. . . . .

Some (non-exhaustive) comments about the October *Galaxy*. UNDER THE HAMMER—I was with Drake all the way. And suddenly the story ended, before I was ready for it to end, and I got the impression that it was Chapter One of a longer work. Well done—but the real kudos, I think, go to Jack Gaughan. Tell Jack that the cover was magnificent! If you should run ————, Jack should be asked to do the art.

EASY RIDER was fun—and I could just see you blow when RMN resigned! MASTER G made me thing of the movie Last Year at Marienbad—a film I rather hated at first but later got to like. I guess the story depends on endless repetition to create a mood, and it's an attempt at art, but for me it was a little long. The TWIST has my approval, and as for metal eating rocks on the moon, I enjoyed having a sample of NASA-style sf before my eyes. Those 76-year old fans really ate it up, I'd guess. James Lacey tries what I usually don't dare—creating a massive confusion from which he doesn't entirely extricate us at the end. . .

. . . . .

Incindentally, I liked Utley's piece in August *Galaxy*—Utley is outdoing himself in creating hilarious, up-beat pieces! It's certainly a step up from a woman with her guts hung up, on the way to becoming an android, to show us the start of the Universe in a Big Bang with a priest fingering the erotic elbow of a female bee! Man alive! I liked it!

So far I still like the October IF best of all your books. It's superb through and through. Even the weakest piece (JULIE) isn't so bad—and I got a really Big Bang out of DEATH AND TAXES. By the way, if you correspond with Colin Kapp—tell him from me that Mephisto is magnificent, as close to a perfect piece of sf as I've seen recently, meaning scientific theme, character, visual effects, and balanced story telling.

. . . . .

Please do *not* print any of my comments in your letter column unless they're attributed to Charles Dickens, or something.

Charles Dickens

I've always wanted to attribute a letter to Charles Dickens.

Dear Jim,

Entropy *can* be reversed! After Fred Pohl quit as editor of *Galaxy* and *If*, both zines went to hell in a handbasket. Thanks to you, both are rising to their former levels of good and fun reading. I tip my space helmet to you.

First of all, a variety of artists. Bravo! Jack Gaughan is a good SF artist, witness his cover and the showcase in the October issue of *Galaxy*, but he was being over worked. Fabian has always been good and several of your new illustrators show great promise.

The quality of your stories has improved to the point where I expect you to be grabbing your fair share of the Hugo's in times to come (now there is a phrase that sounds familiar). And I must compliment you on your features.

Congratulations on your coup in signing Dick Geis on as a regular contributer. The last time something like that happened was when *F&SF* got Isaac Asimov as Science editor.[*Take* that, *Geis! Ed.*]

I'd like to take him to point, however, on his October "Alien Viewpoint" column in *If*.

Now, Dick's alter-ego claims to want realism in SF stories, namely to make the characters more human. Ego seems to claim that to make characters believable, we must place human limitations on them, to wit, give them faults and foibles.

Now I quote from *Before the Golden*

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Age an afterword by Isaac Asimov:
"That hero (of "Submicroscopic" and "Awlo of Ulm") is rich, athletic, and the kind of square-shooter who longs to kill ants for sport, and who does kill an inoffensive deer the instant he sees it, even though he is not hungry at the time and has no intention of eating it. . . .
. . . . . There is love at first sight, the princess who acceps a strange adventurer as her husband. . . . .
. . . . The kind of tale in which virtue just happens to have stronger muscles, readier fists, and better weapons. . . ."

A brief psychoanalytical look at the hero and heroine reveal them to be totally out of touch with reality, failing the grasp clear and present dangers, easily deceived, armed with cruel and vicious tempers, unforgiving, sadistic, masocistic, immature psychotics who are quite impetuous, contradictory, and filled with dark compulsions and obsessions. Is this human enough for alter-ego, Dick?

Seriously, I think SF has produced some outstanding characters. Most have been larger than life, true, but then SF deals with larger than life issues. Name one mundane character who can equal Gully Foyle, Ben Reich, Prestign of Prestign, Lazarus Long, Rysling, Sol Dagenheim, Valentine Michael Smith, or any Puppeteer. Larger than life situations call for larger than life characters. The common, everyday variety would shrivel up and die.

Fortunately it was an extra-ordinary man who suffered a great personal tragedy and not an ordinary one, else Captain Nemo might have spent the rest of his life drifting through various gin shops cursing whatever government happened to be in power instead of building the *Nautiles*. Fortunately an extra-ordinary man was president of a port-Civil War veterans' club instead of an ordinary one, else Impy Barbicane might have lobbied Congress instead of building the greatest cannon in the world and launching himself, two others, and the hopes of a nation to the moon.

Realism's great, but don't forget that it takes a big (confidence) (wo)man to do a big job.

Buzz Dixon

SP4 Hubert C. Dixon
413-90-1390
4th Spt. Co. 4th MSL COMD
Trans.
APO SF 96208

Dear Mr. Baen:

I just finished reading the October issues of *IF* and *Galaxy* and thought they were both superb. I had been thinking of letting my subscriptions to both lapse but now I wouldn't think of doing so. Keep up the excellent work!!!!!!!!!!!

Now to the reasons that I'm writing. First, if "Yours in Christ, J. Parker Wilbern, Chairman, Federal City Conservative Club" was so offended by Mack Reynolds' *Second Advent* that he had to rip it out of the magazine why in the expletive deleted is he reading science fiction in the first place!

Second, I certainly agree with your statement, "Fandom: I will take famdon seriously as long as fandom does not return the favor." I have been reading science fiction seriously for over twenty some years, and the few slight brushes that I have had with fandom have left me with the opinion that famdom on a whole does not read science fiction because they are too busy going to conventions and discussing it.

Third, I also agree with your statement in your editorial, "No, when it comes to defining our field, intensive definitions don't seem to work very well. They just build walls. Unnecessary ones."

Fourth and final, I absolutely adored your story, *Mephisto – The Ion Explorer* by Colin Kapp. It was one of the most beautiful stories I have ever read. Please tell Mr. Kapp that I would like to read more about Dr. Peter Lisbon.

(Mrs.) Lois A. Anderson

Thank you—and another on team story is in the works.

Dear Sirs:

Thank you for sending me the October issues of Galaxy and If, which I had requested in my last letter because my subscription copies had not arrived—even though both issues had been on the newsstands several weeks earlier. My subscription copies finally arrived. If I don't receive a request from you to ship them back, I will give the extra copies to friends to introduce them to these fine magazines.

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Arsen Darnay's "The Eastcoast Confinement" deserved to be the cover story in the October Galaxy. It's by no means a totally original idea, but Mr. Darney's writing skill made it a richly developed story. This begs for expansion into a novel, with two parts to be developed further: the unification of the four interior cultures, and the breakout. The first is easy to foresee, at least in outline. The second will take a lot of thinkingout to reach a logically satisfying conclusion. I think Darnay should be encouraged to proceed.

As an attorney specializing in federal taxation, I have some nits to pick with S. Roger Keith's "Death and Taxes" in the October If. I assume Mr. Keith is an accountant, since his "notes" are preapred by a C.P.A. But really, Mr. Keith—25 A.F.T.R.2d and 52 T.C. published in 2196? These volumes were, in fact, published in 1970 and 1969, respectively. You should have computed the correct volume numbers for that year to maintain a convincing background to your case reports. Along the same line, the Tax Court has never affirmed or reversed a Circuit Court of Appeals, so the correct citation for your first case, for example, would be: *Hegar v. Commissioner*, 476 A.F.T.R.2d 95-392 (ed Cir. 2196), *aff'g* 502 T.C. 76 (2195).

I have a more substantive objection to Mr. Keith's third case. He apparently forgot to check the Citator for an update on his cases before he returned his page proofs to the printer; 537 *Wives of Stud* was reversed on certiorari by the Supreme Court under the rapid review procedures instituted by the Court in 2183. The Second Circuit opinion was manifestly in error, since a joint federal income tax return when more than two spouses are filing is by its very nature a consolidated return: *one* return for everyone. In a joint return, each spouse gets a personal exemption ($3175 for the returns involved in this case), but this is beside the point; federal law permits only one joint return, and on this return there is only one occasion to deduct the shared husband. The Second Circuit reached the right result, but its concept of 537 "joint" returns was absurd. 537 *Wives of Stud v. Commissioner*, 105 U.S.2d 453 (2196), *rev'g per curiam* 263 F.4th 882 (2d Cir.).

Is there any truth the to rumor that If is folding after the December issue?

John T. Sapienza, Jr.
2440 Virginia Avenue, N. W., Apt. D-203
Washington, D.C. 20037

Sirs,

I very much enjoy your magazine, but who can wait two months for Part II of a novel? How long is it going to take us to get thru the middle fifth of Zelazny's *AMBER* series? Torture, pure torture. *(Cackle, cackle.–Ed.)*

Besides having the pleasure of reading about Flandry's faithful Chives serving Chateau Falkayn '35, I really enjoy Anderson's work. With the possible exception of *Tau Zero* I have seen nothing of the future beyond Flandry's declining Empire—for instance with Admiral McCormac's group. Does he plan further human civilizations or other stories?

I am very happy to see R.E. Geis with you—except that he can't seem to find time for his own 'zine now—or he doesn't keep good subscription records for it.

Lt. Howard John Brazee, III
PO Box 1252
Craig AFB, AL, 36701

Is there a future for the Race, after the Empire? I mean, with the damn Merseians just waiting their chance, and all. . .Well, Poul?

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1. Title of publication: Galaxy. 2. Date of filing: Oct. 1, 1974. 3. Frequency of issue. 12 times per year. 4. Location of known office of publication: 235 East 45th St., New York, N.Y. 10017. 5. Location of the headquarters or general business offices of the publishers: 235 East 45th St., New York, N.Y. 10017. 6. Names and addresses of publisher, editor, and managing editor: Publisher, Arnold E. Abramson, 235 East 45th St., New York, N.Y. 10017; Editor, James Baen, 235 East 45th. St., New York, N.Y. 10017; Managing Editor, Bonnie Leigland, 235 East 45th. St., New York, N.Y. 10017. 7. Owner (If owned by a corporation, its name and address must be stated and also immediately thereunder the names and addresses of stockholders owning or holding 1 percent or more of total amount of stock. If not owned by a corporation, the names and addresses of the individual owners must be given. If owned by a partnership or other unincorporated firm, its name and address, as well as that of each individual must be given.) Arnold E. Abramson, Laurel Hill Drive, Pleasantville, N.Y. 10570; Peter J. Abramson, Universal Pub. & Dist. Corp., 235 East 45th St.l New York, N.Y. 10017; Robert J. Abramson, 1015 Post Rd., Scarsdale, N.Y. 10583; Allen & Co. Inc., 30 Broad St., New York, N.Y. 10004; Harland E. Anderson, 125 Elm St., New Caanan, Connecticut; Cede & Co., P.O Box 20, Bowling Green Station, New York. 8. Known bondholders, mortgagess, and other security holders owning or holding 1 percent or more of total amount of bonds, mortgages or other securities; None. 9. For optional completion by publishers mailing at the regular rates (Section 132.121, Postal Service Manual): 39 U.S.C. 3626 provides in pertinent part: "No person who would have been entitled to mail matter under former section 4359 of this title shall mail such matter at the rates provided under this subsection unless he files annually with the Postal Service a written request for permission to mail matter at such rates." In accordance with the provisions of this statute, I hereby request permission to mail the publication named in Item 1 at the reduced postage rates presently authorized by 39 U.S.C. 3626. (Signature and title of editor, publisher, business manager, or owner) Lawrence C. Murphy, CIRCULATION MANAGER. 11. Extent and nature of circulation:

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A. Total No. Copies Printed (*Net Press Run*)	110,481	93,200
B. Paid Circulation		
1. Sales through dealers and carriers, street vendors and counter sales	33,843	33,798
2. Mail subscriptions	13,946	14,928
C. Total Paid Circulation	47,789	48,726
D. Free Distribution by mail, carrier or other means		
1. Samples, complimentary, and other free copies	453	472
2. Copies distributed to news agents, but not sold	62,299	43,702
E. Total Distribution (*Sum of C and D*)	110,541	92,900
F. Office use, left-over, unaccounted, spoiled after printing	300	300
G. Total (*Sum of E & F—should equal net press run shown in A*)	110,841	93,200

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(Signed) LAWRENCE MURPHY
Circulation Manager

STATEMENT OF OWNERSHIP, MANAGEMENT AND CIRCULATION (Required by) Act of August 12, 1970: Section 3685. Title 39. United States Code.

1. Title of publication: Worlds of IF. 2. Date of filing: Oct. 1, 1974. 3. Frequency of issue. Bi-Monthly—6 times per yr.—Jan.-Feb.; Mar.-Apr.; May-June; July-Aug., Sept.-Oct.; Nov.-Dec. 4. Location of known office of publication: 235 East 45th St., New York, N.Y. 10017. 5. Location of the headquarters or general business offices of the publishers: 235 East 45th St., New York, N.Y. 10017. 6. Names and addresses of publisher, editor, and managing editor: Publisher, Arnold E. Abramson, 235 East 45th St., New York, N.Y. 10017; Editor, James Baen, 235 East 45th St., New York, N.Y. 10017; Managing Editor, Bonnie Leigland, 235 East 45th St., New York, N.Y. 10017. 7. Owner (If owned by a corporation, its name and address must be stated and also immediately thereunder the names and addresses of stockholders owning or holding 1 percent or more of total amount of stock. If not owned by a corporation, the names and addresses of the individual owners must be given. If owned by a partnership or other unincorporated firm, its name and address, as well as that of each individual must be given.) Arnold E. Abramson, Laurel Hill Drive, Pleasantville, N.Y. 10570; Peter J. Abramson, Universal Pub. & Dist. Corp., 235 East 45th St., New York, N.Y. 10017; Robert J. Abramson, 1015 Post Rd., Scarsdale, N.Y. 10583; Allen & Co., Inc., 30 Broad St., New York, N.Y. 10004; Harlan E. Anderson, 125 Elm St., New Caanan, Connecticut; Cede & Cp., P.O. Box 20, Bowling Green Station, New York. 8. Known bondholders, mortgagees, and other security holders owning or holding 1 percent or more of total amount of bonds, mortgages or other securities; None. 9. For optional completion by publishers mailing at the regular rates (Section 132.121, Postal Service Manual): 39 U.S.C. 3626 provides in pertinent part: "No person who would have been entitled to mail matter under former section 4359 of this title shall mail such matter at the rates provided under this subsection unless he files annually with the Postal Service a written request for permission to mail matter at such rates." In accordance with the provisions of this statute, I hereby request permission to mail the publication named in Item 1 at the reduced postage rates presently authorized by 39 U.S.C. 3626. (Signature and title of editor, publisher, business manager, or owner) Lawrence C. Murphy, CIRCULATION MANAGER. 11. Extent and nature of circulation:

	Average 12 mos.	Single Issue
A. Total No. Copies Printed (*Net Press Run*)	98,315	78,700
B. Paid Circulation		
1. Sales through dealers and carriers, street vendors and counter sales	35,453	31,500
2. Mail subscriptions	14,902	20,500
C. Total Paid Circulation	50,355	52,000
D. Free Distribution by mail, carrier or other means		
1. Samples, complimentary, and other free copies	413	500
2. Copies distributed to news agents, but not sold	47,347	26,000
E. Total Distribution (*Sum of C and D*)	98,115	78,500
F. Office use, left-over, unaccounted, spoiled after printing	200	200
G. Total (*Sum of E & F—should equal net press run shown in A*)	98,315	78,700

I certify that the statements made by me above are correct and complete.

(Signed) LAWRENCE MURPHY
Circulation Manager

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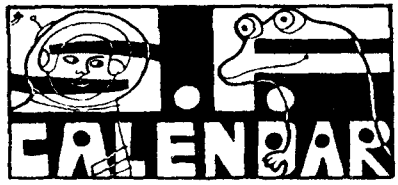

JAN. 24-16. ConFUSION 13 in the Michigan League, Ann Arbor, Michigan. GoH: Fred Pohl. Fan GoH: Mike Glicksohn. For info: Ro Nagey, Rm. 240 Michigan Union, U. of Mich., Ann Arbor, Mi. 48104.

FEB. 20-23. DESERT CON III at the University of Arizona. For info: Desert Con III, SUPO Box 10,000, Tuscon, Az. 85720

MARCH 14-16. LEPRECON, Phoenix, Az. Quality Inn Motel, Larry Niven GoH. Banquet, Films, panels, artshow. Hucksters welcome. Memberships $4, $5 at the door. For more info, write Tim Kyger, 702 E. Vista Del Cerro, Tempe, Az. 85281.

MAY 25-27. MEDIEVALCON, Francisco Torres, Santa Barbara, Calif. Membership $7.50 attending, $3 supporting. Write Medievalcon, Box 23354, Los Angeles CA 90023. Make reservations early.

JULY 3-6. WESTERCON 28 at the Hotel Leamington, Oakland, Calif. GoH: David Gerrold, Special GoH: Charlie and Dena Brown. Membership to July 7, 1974: $4, $5 to May 1, 1975, $6 thereafter. For info: P.O. Box 24560, Los Angeles, CA 90024

AUGUST 14-17. AUSSIECON (33rd World Science Fiction Convention) at the Southern Cross Hotel, Melbourne, Australia. GoH: Ursula K. Le Guin, Fan GoHs: Mike & Susan Glicksohn. Reg: $A2 supporting, $A $7 attending. For info: Aussiecon, GPO Box 4039, Melbourne 3001, Victoria, Australia.

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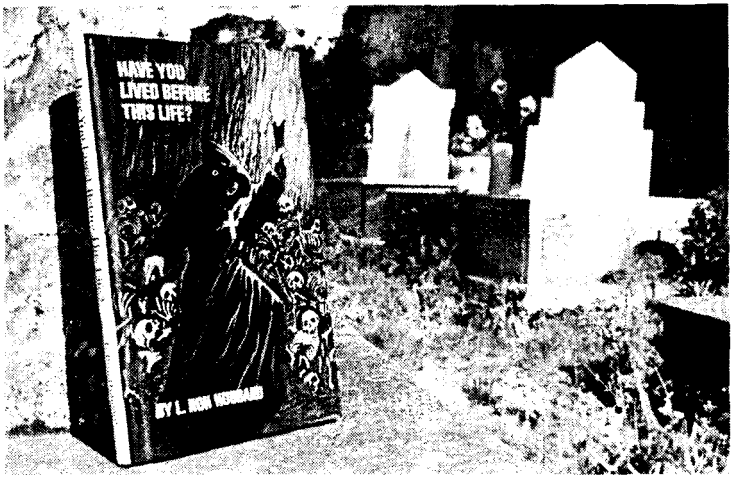

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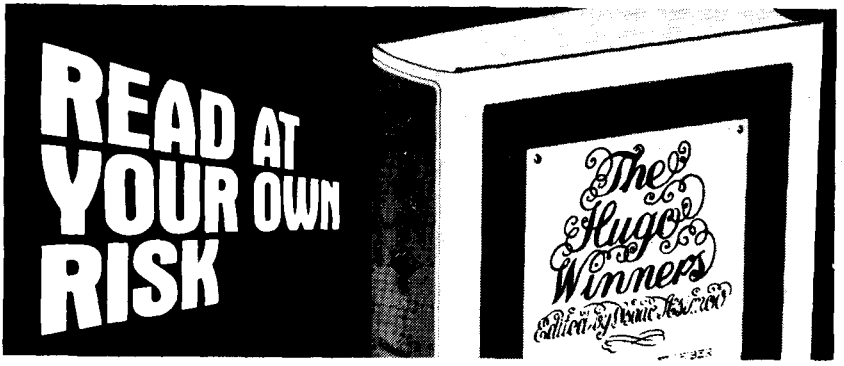

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